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LOVER'S STRATAGEM:

OR,

THE TWO SUITORS.

BY EMILIE FLYGARE CARLEN,

AUTHOR OF "IVAN; OR, THE SERJANTS-BOY."

NEW YORK:

HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS,

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Unabridged and Unaltered.

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7

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THE LOVER'S STRATAGEM;

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CHAPTER I.

However much the feelings in mature years may be occupied with the present, yet it is seldom powerful enough exclusively to fix the thoughts; Memory always reverts to the past, while Hope seeks the future.—SPARRS.

On a cold, foggy, February morning a ragged boy, such as one often meets in the streets, hastened through a long, narrow, back street in the town of L——.

He stopped before a little insignificant house, drew forth a piece of paper, folded up, which he had hid in the fragments of his waistcoat-pocket, looked at it narrowly, and grumbled to himself—

"I shall get nothing from him for this; he can neither pay for letters, nor indeed for any thing else. But he must get this scrap; I dare not do otherwise."

Hereupon he entered the house, went through a long dark passage, and at last ascended a narrow, rickety staircase, which led to the second floor, and close by a low door, which was fastened by a wooden latch, he stopped.

The lad knocked, and a deep, somewhat harsh bass voice answered from within with the usual "Come in!" But before we go further we will take the liberty of making our readers acquainted with this miserable dwelling, and the persons who inhabited it.

It was a close, dark, and uncomfortable room, the gloomy appearance of which was much heightened by the window being entirely frozen over. Some dying embers glimmered in a stove composed of tiles, which had been formerly plastered with cement, but was now partly fallen in, and covered with smoke, and the whole bore the stamp of great poverty. In an antique arm-chair, whose gilt work and faded cover of gold brocade, contrasted strangely with the few wooden chairs and plain deal table, which, along with a most miserable bed, formed the whole furniture, sat the post-inspector, William Von Spalden.

This old relic of family furniture, as well as its occupier, seemed by some unfavorable caprice of Fate, to have been thrown into this wretched hovel. On the post-inspector's wrinkled brow might be read the quiet of resignation, but at the same time one dis-

tinctly saw, that while his eyes were immovably fixed on the expiring embers, his thoughts were not in the present, but in the remembrance of past days; and as these silent images appeared more clear or gloomy, his figure swayed forward, or sank back into its former position. He was a tall, thin man, whose fiery dark eyes at times shot forth flashes, which seemed as though they could consume the objects they fell upon. His whole exterior showed that sorrow, more than years, had bent his frame, and imprinted the stamp of premature old age on his pale countenance.

At the corner of the stove sat his wife, a lady of middle age, on whose soft, mild features years and anxieties had made but slight impression, and had still left evident traces of a once unusual beauty. She industriously turned her spinning-wheel, which from the cold had become quite heavy, and moistened at times the thread with silent tears, when she thought of the days of sorrow and privation, which were yet perhaps to be struggled through, and over which no star of hope seemed to rise.

During the silence which had followed after a previous conversation, the post-inspector got up, knocked his pipe with such force against the stove, that another piece of the cement came off, and said, in a violent tone: "It shall be as I have said, so not another word upon the subject."

"In heaven's name, then," answered the wife, with quiet resignation, "I have done what I could to persuade you, but it is in vain. Spare me at least the pain of informing poor Augusta of this last sacrifice. You will do it yourself, husband? I know how deeply it will grieve her, notwithstanding all her filial love and resignation."

"Woman!" interrupted the post-inspector in a harsh tone, "do you call it a sacrifice, when a daughter parts with an unnecessary piece of furniture to save herself and her parents from cold and hunger? Do not drive me mad," added he, somewhat more gently, "with your eternal sighing. Would not people have good cause to sneer, if they heard that the post-inspector Von Spalden, who

has absolutely nothing to live upon but the few pence he gains by copying, and his women-folk by needle-work, is so foolish as to keep a piano-forte for his daughter!"

"Ah," sighed Mrs. Von Spalden, "you have never in the whole course of your life troubled yourself about what other people have judged, thought, or said—you always know best yourself. And surely none but heartless and bad people could blame you, if you granted your poor child this small consolation, which in the evening of a day spent in toil and labor, awaits her in her little chamber."

"You put my patience to too great a proof, Rigitza," said the post-inspector, in a tone which commanded silence. "Ever since the cursed cession, I have so often heard you vary this theme, in a way which does not at all become you, that I, like many others, would perhaps have done wiser, to have sent a bullet through my head, than to have relied on the fortitude of a woman in misfortune. But, happily, the girl is more reasonable than you, and the thing must be soon settled."

Thereupon he went to the door which separated the daughter's little chamber from the room already described, and called, "Augusta!"

After a few seconds the girl appeared. Much could be said about Augusta's figure, eyes, and complexion, but we refer the reader in these respects to the inexhaustible treasure of enchanting descriptions of beauty which most novels offer, and content ourselves merely with the assurance that she possessed beauty, innocence, goodness, and sense.

"My child," began her father, in a kind and forbearing tone. "You have shown during our trials much strength of mind for your age. I have now an opportunity of putting you to the highest test, for I must inform you that the burgomaster is thinking of buying your piano. As want is at the door, no choice is left us; to-morrow they will take away the instrument. I am sure you will behave yourself in this matter as it becomes a dutiful daughter."

"Ah, my dear father," answered Augusta, "how gladly would I not obey your wish! It would give me the greatest pleasure to procure for you relief in your pressing want; but, to my sorrow, I am obliged to tell you, that the burgomaster has let me know, through his daughter, that he is no longer in a position to pay more than a third of the sum demanded."

Anger darkened for a moment the gloomy features of the post-inspector. "Ah!" murmured he to himself, "the usual way of the world; the wretched, pitiful calculation of baseness, which always tries to win at the cost of the suffering." He measured the room with slow steps. "But no, rather starve and freeze, than allow one's self, like

an insect, to be trodden on by the foot of insolence.—Augusta," said he, after a while, "you may keep your piano for a time: but tell me, my dear child, why did they come to you with this news?" Augusta, blushing, cast her eyes down and was silent. "Answer, my child, sincerely; you know I never allow evasions."

Augusta stammered timidly—"Dear papa, it was I who made the request to the burgomaster that he would speak to you about the sale of the instrument."

The post-inspector spoke not a word; but a feeling, seldom experienced, thrilled through him. The first tears which he ever remembered in his life to have shed fell upon his daughter's brow, as he silently embraced her. He then turned suddenly away and seemed for a few minutes lost in thought.

Our acquaintance of the street knocked at this moment at the door, entered, after receiving permission, and delivered the folded paper to the post-inspector.

Mr. Von Spalden's glances seemed as if they would devour the contents—he looked as though he feared the small strokes of the pen might disappear while his eyes dwelt upon them. After a few minutes he went to one corner of the room, drew forth a little box, took out of it his last halfpenny, and gave it to the lad, who speedily departed. The important piece of paper was now read aloud, and contained the following:

"A weighty letter, with a foreign post-mark, can be called for at the general post-office here, on payment of two rix-dollars and a half.

C. WILSON, *Postmaster*."

"L—, the 16th February, 1835."

On the countenances of the two ladies were to be read the most lively joy and surprise. The post-inspector gazed straight before him in deep thought.

"I can not understand it," said he at last. "Could Rudolph have heard of my misfortunes? That is not likely; and still less so, that he would care to decrease the weight of them, he who—" He stopped. A few minutes after he added, "It can hardly be money?" He shook his head: "Who would send a letter with money in it!"

"Let it be what it may, my friend," mildly interrupted Mrs. Von Spalden, "there exists a little condition which prevents us from satisfying our curiosity, and which, above all things, is a subject which must be considered. Where shall we get the money to pay for the letter?"

"Hem, hem!" said the post-inspector, scratching behind his ears—"that is very important. I will on no account apply to the burgomaster, who once was my best friend. Just let me think if there is no one else who would advance me this miserable sum." He tried to recollect, but as soon as

he thought of one out of the circle of his acquaintances, he always began to fear a refusal, for this had so often happened to him.

"I will go and pay some visits," said Mrs. Von Spalden, in a determined manner; "I hope still to possess some friends who can be induced to help us. Quick, Augusta! fetch my cloak!"

The good lady's toilet was soon finished, and accompanied by the best wishes of her husband and daughter, she went forth on the uncertain voyage of discovery after old friends.

CHAPTER II.

REMINISCENCES.

In the mean while let us cast a few glances on the former events in the life of this family.

The post-inspector, William Von Spalden, was the third son of Major Peter Adrian Von Spalden, who possessed the noble property of Ulriksdal. His two elder sons entered early into the army, and the youngest at that time still attended college. During the campaign of 1788, the eldest brother died in an hospital. He had always been his father's favorite; and the letter which communicated to the old man the intelligence that his Gustavus had not died the honorable death of a soldier, but, in consequence of disease, was, in a certain degree, double news of death; for the father survived this blow only a few days.

The affairs of the estate were confided to a friend of the family, who managed it in such a way, that the brothers, when they came of age, were spared all care in this respect. The property was sold, and instead of the large inheritance they had expected, there remained for each only the poor sum of two thousand rix-dollars, wherewith to seek their fortune in the world.

Rudolph was lively, mild, and amiable. To his deep sense of the true and good, he united the strictest candor in all his actions, and might be looked upon as a pattern of regularity in his private life. William was, it is true, not entirely the opposite to him; but a morose seriousness, an overweening thirst of power, and a degree of selfishness, curiously blended with credulity, formed the principal features of his character. His brother was the only person toward whom he tried to soften these qualities, and to observe a less repulsive manner.

In the course of the year 1812, Rudolph went to visit his brother William, who had obtained an appointment as secretary in the post-office in L——; but here, alas! an evil star arose above them. They both fell in love with the only daughter of the post-inspector Löwe, the beautiful Rigitza.

Rudolph won the maiden's heart—William became the favorite of the father, who could not endure military men. Then the demon of discord, strife, and envy rose up between the brothers. Rudolph took his leave, and traveled to America to get rid of his sorrow, and to begin anew the framework of his happiness.

Three years afterward, William stood at the altar with Rigitza, who was still inconsolable for the loss of Rudolph. She gradually became accustomed to that which could not be altered, and although in secret she heaved many a sigh for Rudolph, yet she made her husband a good and truly submissive wife. Augusta's birth, which took place two years after their union, was a cheering event in her hitherto saddened life; henceforth all was not so gloomy. By the death of his father-in-law, William Von Spalden not only stepped into the appointment, but also into the considerable property of the deceased. Every thing went well with him; Fortune bestowed her gifts on him with a liberal hand.

Only once in the course of many years did Rudolph visit his brother. He observed his domestic arrangements. The post-inspector had already begun to evince his despotic temper, and with sorrow Rudolph perceived that the calmness of his sister-in-law arose from resignation and habit rather than from heartfelt contentment. Aware, however, that the interference of a third person could only aggravate the evil, he determined on returning to his new, and now far-distant home. Before leaving them, he pressed the little Augusta, then ten years old, with sorrowful thoughts to his heart, and promised to provide for her in future; for Rudolph Von Spalden by this time was a wealthy man, a life of business having drawn forth his energy, activity, and great capacities.

In the mean time, year after year flew on, Augusta had attained the age of seventeen; but no news came from uncle Rudolph. About this time a young man connected with business appeared in L——; one of those speculators who, when they have played their part without success, in a few larger towns, where the creditors have been so impolite as, in the midst of the farce, to let the curtain fall, try anew their luck in smaller places.

All thought that the stranger's affairs must be thriving; for he lived surrounded with such splendor, that every mother who had marriageable daughters cast longing glances toward the young and agreeable Blandin. He, however, knew right well how necessary it was for him to obtain a girl with money, and therefore his choice fell on Miss Von Spalden.

The post-inspector, who was in the highest degree prepossessed in his favor, tried

by every possible means to convince his wife and daughter that a better match could not be found for the latter; but, on this one occasion, Mrs. Von Spalden dared to be of a different opinion from her husband. "Augusta can not bear the fawning young man," said she; "and added to this, how can you rely with certainty on his fortune and character? I fear you judge too rashly in both respects, particularly when the happiness or misery of our only child depends on it. Many here declare their firm conviction that this grandeur is all a false appearance of independence, with which he too well understands how to surround himself, but which will soon disappear; and a fixed pre-emptment obliges me also to share this conviction."

"But I do not share it," passionately exclaimed the post-inspector, surprised at the boldness of any one, and particularly that one his own wife, for daring to cast a doubt on the infallibility of his judgment. He was not accustomed to accommodate his will in any one thing to those of others, and opposition, be it ever so mildly uttered, irritated him beyond measure. But as he plainly saw that it would be impossible to influence his wife and daughter, he determined to make use of the same means which his deceased father-in-law had employed toward himself with such success. Therefore, when, to commemorate Augusta's eighteenth birthday, a brilliant assembly was gathered together at the post-inspector's house, he formally acquainted his guests that he celebrated that day his daughter's engagement with Mr. Blandin.

Augusta's first sensation at this cruel and despotic action of her father was anger. Though very sweet-tempered, she was not without pride, and her feelings were much excited by this heartless proceeding. For one moment the thought passed through her mind to defy the paternal authority by public contradiction, and thus, by showing her independence, preserve herself-esteem, which, together with her future happiness, was threatened to be lost. But this thought was only passing, so strong was the habit of blind submission and obedience to the commands of her father.

When the guests were all gone, Augusta fell at her father's feet and begged for pity. In vain were her prayers, in vain her tears—the despot would not break his word.

Mr. Blandin paid his respects daily in his character of *fiancé*, but the greater portion of the time which these visits occupied was spent in Mr. Von Spalden's office.

In the mean time people began in L—— to talk more openly of the doubtful circumstances of the young man. Various suspicious incidents were rumored of his former position, still the post-inspector turned a deaf ear to all that was said, so well had Blandin

succeeded in deceiving him. At length he confessed to his future father-in-law that a business transaction, from which he had good reason to expect a sure and considerable profit, had failed, and that as he had employed all his spare money in it, he should be ruined if he could not get security for a small sum which, in this case, would be at his command.

This little sum, nevertheless, far exceeded Mr. Von Spalden's income; however, as Blandin assured him upon his honor, that were he only assisted in this affair, he would stand on firm ground again, all doubts were removed which possibly might have entered the post-inspector's mind.

In vain were Mrs. Von Spalden's remonstrances and tears. In vain all his friends advised him to retract. He became security. Two months after this, Blandin failed; the following day he had disappeared; leaving behind him nothing but a letter to the post-inspector, in which he returned to him the betrothal ring and informed him that an unlucky fate prevented him from enjoying the happiness which the post-inspector had intended for him through the hand of his daughter, and that the debts into which this same power had plunged him, should, when time and circumstances permitted, with many thanks be paid, both to the post-inspector and his other much esteemed creditors. Further, that he considered as a sincere proof of the post-inspector's often expressed friendship for him, that he had stood security for him, &c.

The post-inspector's whole property was not sufficient to pay for his obstinate credulity. He was threatened with imprisonment for the remainder of the sum; the consequence of which was, that he had to resign his appointment as well as his property, and with difficulty, Mr. Von Spalden saved his honor amid the entire destruction of his prospects.

More than a year had passed since these sad circumstances had obliged the post-inspector and his family to take refuge in the miserable abode where our readers first became acquainted with them.

There still remained one means of restoring his entirely prostrated circumstances, but to this the post-inspector would not have recourse, except in the most pressing necessity. The new postmaster had offered Augusta his hand; but as she had, if possible, a still greater dislike to the haughty Wilson, than she felt for the runaway Blandin, her father did not like to use his authority again, which before had been employed in so bad a cause. The misfortune which he had drawn upon his family, as well as on himself, had somewhat softened his heart. In the mean time their position became more and more trying; deeper and deeper they sank in misfortune and poverty, when an unexpected event gave a new aspect to affairs.

CHAPTER III.

THE STRANGER.

MRS. VON SPALDEN, had visited the few friends on whose assistance she had hoped to be able to depend. But, alas! she deceived herself in her hopes. With a heavy heart she now turned to the street which led to the post-office, to see what she could effect with Mr. Wilson by word of mouth. He sat at his desk when Mrs. Von Spalden entered. She had the appearance of an unhappy petitioner, who, with a deep feeling of the humiliation of her situation, is still driven by that scourge, poverty, to claim the pity of others. The postmaster politely offered her a chair, and, bowing slightly, inquired after the health and welfare of herself and her family.

"The first is good," cheerfully answered Mrs. Von Spalden, delighted at the postmaster's courtesy; "but the welfare is, alas! not very great. In consequence of which, I have a request to make, Mr. Wilson," added she in a trembling voice, and timidly inclining her head.

"I shall be happy, madam, most happy, if I can do you a service; but allow me to take advantage of this opportunity, which offers me a private conversation with you, to ask you if your daughter has not yet made up her mind to exchange her present life for that which, if not happier, would at least be free of care, which I am willing to offer her and her parents?"

"My dear Mr. Wilson," answered Mrs. Von Spalden, grieved and embarrassed at the turn the conversation had taken, "Augusta is obstinate on this point; we can do nothing with her. But permit me to mention my errand, which, as you will easily guess, relates to the letter."

"I understand, madam," said the postmaster, in a tone which betrayed forcibly his wrath. "the letter is at your service as soon as it pleases you to pay the postage."

"Unfortunately, I can not do so at present; but trust to my honesty, in a few days it will be in my power."

"I am sorry," replied Wilson, shrugging his shoulders, "that I can not accede to your wish; unfortunately it is an inviolable rule of mine, never to give letters on credit."

"But, Mr. Wilson, you can not doubt my word?"

The noise of the diligence, which at this moment rolled past the post-office, caused Mr. Wilson's answer to die on his lips.

"Stop!" cried a well-toned, manly voice. A moment after, the bell was rung, and a gentleman of a tall figure, noble carriage, and regular, handsome features, entered the room. He seemed to be in the flower of life, and a dark, curious traveling dress, which in our country is not general, gave him a somewhat foreign appearance.

"Are there any letters here for A. C. Sterner?" asked the same agreeable voice, which had been before heard.

The postmaster drew forth several letters, which had been placed on one side, and said, "These came by this day's post: they are addressed to 'Major A. C. Sterner;' is that right?"

"That is quite correct."

While the stranger was putting the letters he had just received into his traveling-pocket, Mrs. Von Spalden once more drew near to Mr. Wilson, and begged him, in an agitated voice, to grant her a few days' credit.

"You have heard my answer, Mrs. Von Spalden," said the postmaster stiffly; "lay down two rix-dollars and a half, and you will get the letter, or—excuse me, I am engaged."

The stranger, who was already in the doorway, turned quickly round. The name, or something else, must have caught his attention. He appeared to be for a moment undecided; then approaching Mrs. Von Spalden with a respectful bow, who, as much hurt by Wilson's haughty, uncivil manner, as by the refusal, was about to leave the post-office, much dejected at the failure of her hopes.

"Madam," said the stranger, in a kind, sympathizing tone, which was intended to inspire confidence, "it may not appear very delicate of me, that I, who am an entire stranger, should offer you my services, but, if I have heard aright, you wish to obtain a letter, for which you have not at this moment the means of paying. Excuse my intrusion, but permit me to render you this insignificant service, and advance you the money. I pray you to be assured I do so with the greatest pleasure."

Mrs. Von Spalden looked at the speaker with surprise and gratitude. His manner, as well as the expressive tone of his voice, did not fail in their effect. With reviving confidence she answered—"I accept your offer with gratitude, sir, and shall never forget the generosity of the stranger: but, pray have the goodness to let me know where, and to whom, I may send my little debt, for I hope in a few days to be able to pay it."

"Oh, we shall meet each other again," said the stranger with a significant smile, as he put down the sum, bowed gracefully, and was once more in the diligence before Mrs. Von Spalden could stammer forth her thanks.

In great anger the postmaster felt himself obliged to deliver up the letter.

This dear, important, long-wished-for letter lay at last in her hands. All the trouble, humiliation, and uneasiness which it had caused her were forgotten. She balanced its weight in her hand, narrowly observed the numerous mysterious seals, and examined with attention the post-mark, which was from

Hamburg. Only he who has been himself in desperate circumstances, and has held a letter in his hand, the contents of which he suspects might prove his passport from the cares and adversities of life to its comforts and pleasures, can form a correct idea of what Mrs. Von Spalden felt at this moment.

"No doubt, good Rudolph has spared us a mite from his abundance," said she to herself, as she turned with hastening steps toward home, where she knew her husband awaited her return with the greatest impatience.

"Well, how have you succeeded?" cried the post-inspector, when his wife was half way up-stairs.

"Capitally, my dear," and she delivered to him the treasure with a face beaming with joy.

"Augusta, child, my spectacles!" exclaimed the post-inspector, as he broke the seals with a trembling hand. The three members of the family scarcely dared to breathe, till the envelope at length fell to the ground, and their inquiring glances rested upon three papers, but neither money nor remittance. One of the papers was an open letter, another a copy of a will, and the third a sealed note to Augusta.

After they had silently looked at each other for awhile, which gave the ladies an opportunity of observing how long the post-inspector's face became, he opened the letter addressed to himself. It was from the Swedish Consul in Hamburg, and contained the news, that the deceased Mr. Rudolph Von Spalden, shortly before his death, which had taken place about a month ago, had deposited with Messrs. Reis and Co. the sum of ten thousand rix-dollars in the name of his brother, the post-inspector, William Von Spalden, which sum would be remitted as soon as the requisite testimonials were forwarded; for further information he referred him to the inclosed copy of the will.

The letter was dated the 2d of January, 1835.

A fervent sigh of gratitude to Providence for so unexpectedly lightening their load of care, rose with pure devotion from the hearts of the ladies, while they shed tears of sincere sorrow in memory of the noble deceased.

"Peace be with his soul!" said the post-inspector, with clasped hands. "He went at the right time," quickly added he, and snatched at the will with joyful looks.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SUITOR.

AFTER the usual introduction, the will ran as follows:

"Except the two sums of ten thousand rix-dollars, deposited with Reis and Co. in

Hamburg, of which sums, the one is intended for my brother, the post-inspector, William Von Spalden, in L—, the other for my sister, the widow of Judge Stolzenbeck, in —, I hereby will, that the whole of my remaining property, which, with movable and immovable goods, amounts to sixty thousand Hamburg marks, shall go to Mr. Constantine Sterner, who well deserves this small mark of my gratitude, for the great service he rendered me. I also hereby declare, my last and most earnest wish in this life—namely, that the above-named Sterner should be united in the bond of matrimony with my beloved niece, Augusta Von Spalden. Should there, however, be impediments to this marriage on her side (I am convinced there will be none on his), be it either from disinclination, or a previously formed alliance, Constantine Sterner remains, nevertheless, with the above-named exceptions, my heir. Under these circumstances my wishes are (but their fulfillment shall entirely depend upon him), that he should cede a small sum of the inheritance in favor of Augusta Von Spalden."

Some further directions, and the signatures of the testator and witnesses closed the document.

"Ah, heavens!" sighed Augusta, "am I then again doomed to be sacrificed to the will of another!"

"Don't be foolish, child," exclaimed Mr. Von Spalden, while he gazed at the will, as though he feared all was a phantasm of the imagination.

"Sacrifice! of what are you thinking? I tell you, it is a great—an unheard-of happiness; the thing speaks for itself, Augusta. In heaven's name, bring me my dress-coat; I must go immediately to the Burgomaster's."

"What do I see, my child—tears?" said the over-happy mother, as she fetched her husband's black dress-coat out of the closet. "But let us hear," added she, hanging the coat over the back of the chair, "what the letter to you contains."

Augusta opened the elegant-looking letter and read:

"The inclosed copy of your deceased uncle's will, will justify the bold step which I, as an entire stranger, am about to take in addressing this letter to you; but as we both are acquainted with his wish, expressed two months before his death, touching a matrimonial alliance between us, I have thought it my duty not to leave you in doubt about my sentiments. My heart has until now remained free, and entirely untouched by the power which is ascribed to love; you may, therefore, conclude that I look forward, not only without reluctance, but, indeed, with great anxiety to the time, when I shall see, and personally become acquainted with her, whom my departed friend so earnestly

wished to be my companion through life. This period will arrive, I hope, at the furthest in four months.

"As, in the meantime, my cousin and much-esteemed friend, the Major Alexander Constantine Sterner starts this day for Sweden, I have taken advantage of this opportunity to send you my portrait by him, and beg as a favor of you, that you will have the goodness in return to give him yours to forward to me. Should there already exist any impediment to this marriage, I then beg that you will make my cousin acquainted with it, as also with any other circumstance which relates to me, be it of whatever nature it may. He possesses my entire confidence, and what his acts will be as binding as if I were personally on the spot; he not only represents me in matters, which on my account cause him to visit his native country, but also, in all that relates to the peculiar position in which your uncle's will has placed us.

"Impatiently waiting the time which will see me at your feet, believe me, with much esteem, your obedient servant,

"CONSTANTINE STERNER."

"It is he—it is certainly he—yes, it is as clear as day," eagerly exclaimed Mrs. Von Spalden. "That's just it! Let me see, what was it? A. C. Sterner, that stands for Alexander Constantine—there is no doubt of it; but, goodness! what will he think of us!" muttered she in a pitiful tone, and wrung her hands in consternation.

"Who? what is clear? who will think something?" in astonishment demanded the post-inspector.

"O, how can you ask me! I mean Major Sterner, who gave me the money to pay for the letter. But it is true, I have not been able to tell you of it yet."

"Stern!" cried father and daughter together: what has he to do with the matter? Truly, Rigitza," smilingly said the post-inspector, "I fear all this has turned your brain."

"Well, that would be no wonder," answered his wife; "nevertheless it is but too true." She now related her adventure of the morning, and Sterner's noble action, and was just about to repeat his last words, "We shall meet again," when a knocking at the door announced that some one craved admittance. A soft, "Lord have mercy on us, there he is already!" sounded pianissimo, but in chorus, from the lips of the whole family. With two springs Augusta reached her chamber; the wife seized quicker than thought her false front, and her cap, which hung on the window clasp. The post-inspector tried between quick and frightful contortions of the back, and furious swingings of the arms, to exchange his dressing-gown for his dress-coat; but, as every one knows, frantic endeavors often fail, and little

time elapses between the knocking at the door, and the opening of the same, one can not wonder, then, that notwithstanding the efforts of the worthy couple, the post-inspector had scarcely got his right arm happily through the sleeve of his Sunday coat, while the other still clung to the dressing-gown, which, with the obstinacy of old age, set at defiance all jerks and shakes, and the wife, on the other hand, was standing with her cap over her ear, and the ringlets in the middle of her forehead, when the door, creaking on its rusty hinges, slowly opened, and, it is true, not Sterner, but yet, what indeed was no better, his servant entered. He, one of the most *distingué* elegants of the fraternity, glanced disdainfully round, and drew himself up, so as to cast the weight of his body on his right foot, while he carelessly switched the shining boot of the left with a riding whip, and affectedly said, giving at the same time one of those half-inclinations which appeared to him suitable to the occasion:

"My master, Major Sterner, who has just arrived from Hamburg, where we spent a little while, would be glad to know when he may have the honor of paying his respects to you."

The post-inspector, who, as much from annoyance at the attitude in which he found himself, as from the struggle with his coat, was quite flushed, now turned round, and after having pretended to curse the servants (his former faithful servants), he said, with as much importance as, considering the circumstances, he could lay in his words—

"I thank Major Sterner, but shall do myself the pleasure of paying him a visit this afternoon."

The servant departed, as it appeared, much surprised at this answer.

"But, my dear," began Mrs. Von Spalden, when they had somewhat recovered themselves after these anxious moments, "we can not refuse to receive him."

"But, my dear," scoffed the post-inspector, "is this a room for the family Von Spalden to receive the proxy of a lover worth sixty thousand Hamburg marks?"

"But, you forget that the Major is quite well acquainted with our circumstances. The adventure at the post-office proves to him that, in our present position, our reception of him can not admit of extravagant arrangements."

"Curse it!" murmured the post-inspector.

"It can not be helped now," answered his wife, and they set about to hold a grand council how they could best receive the foreign ambassador. But the post-inspector, who had never great faith in the opinions of women, either in this or in any other case, soon left them, crammed the precious documents into his pocket, and took himself off to the governor of the town. A few short

hours ago nothing could have induced him to do this, but how much was not changed since then!

The assured steps of the post-inspector as he hastened up the street, showed a man who had recovered his self-dependence. This was quite evident to every one who from their windows observed his figure and deportment. He went along as upright as a grenadier, and held his head quite as immovable and as proudly as in days gone by.

"I could swear that last night the post-inspector had delightful dreams about a rich inheritance, or winning in a lottery," was every where whispered behind the venetian blinds.

When he had related to the Burgomaster the important news of the morning, and the latter had read all the documents through, he shook the post-inspector's hand with much warmth and said—

"I congratulate you, my dear sir, with all my heart, and I hope that in future, as until now, we shall remain friends; but you must receive the ambassador, my good sir."

CHAPTER V.

THE PROXY.

IN the large hotel of the town of L——, room No. 2, which is to the right as you go up stairs, sat Major Alexander Constantine Sterner at a table, which was covered with letters and papers. As we have already formerly had an opportunity of introducing him to our readers at Madame T——'s* in Stockholm, and more recently at the post-office, we need only add, with respect to his appearance, that he no longer wore the odd traveling dress, but in its stead had on a fashionable, handsome dark olive-colored coat, which if possible set off to still greater advantage his tall and extremely graceful figure. The Major evidently seemed to have his attention fixed more on the noise from the street than on the papers which lay before him. From time to time he listened attentively—at length he rose, walked to the window, opened it, notwithstanding the severe cold, and remained for some minutes standing there in the attitude of one, who with the most intense impatience, awaits the arrival of some person. He hastily shut the window, snatched up a book which lay on the mantle-piece, and seated himself on the sofa with the tranquil exterior of one whose feelings never stray from their habitual equanimity, and read with such eagerness, or pretended to do so, that his servant coughed twice and shuffled three times with his foot before he looked up, and said, in the most indifferent tone in the world—

"Well, Westerlind, when can they receive me?"

"Indeed, I can not tell you," answered the servant, with a slight sneer; "neither the family nor their lodging looked as though they expected a visit."

"Scoundrel!" said the Major, as his angry glance fell upon the servant; "I do not like disrespectful remarks. Remember that for the future. Repeat briefly but distinctly the answer you received."

Westerlind looked crest-fallen, and repeated the post-inspector's own words—

"I thank Major Sterner, but shall do myself the pleasure of paying him a visit this afternoon."

"That is well; it is very polite of Mr. Von Spalden," said the Major, carelessly, all the while unconsciously tearing in little pieces the title page of a new book containing quite a novel treatise on the breeding of cattle, and which the landlord *Traiteur Teifer*, with his usual attention to the amusement and edification of his guests, had laid in the room.

"Here, Westerlind—did you see no one else of the family?" added he.

"Nobody, except a middle-aged lady, with most extraordinary ringlets on her forehead; I beg pardon—she was, possibly, the woman of the house."

"You may go—give orders that they get my dinner precisely at three o'clock."

The servant was already in the door-way, when his master called him back.

"You must go into the town and look about for apartments for me, which will be at my disposal during my journeys to and from L——. I do not like living in an hotel: and as I have a great deal of business to settle with Mr. Von Spalden, I wish—do you understand, Westerlind?—on account of the convenience of the thing, that you should find me a lodging directly opposite his house—I do not care about the price—do you understand?"

"Perfectly," answered Westerlind; "only I fear I shall not be able to accomplish your commands, sir, to your satisfaction, as Mr. Von Spalden's house is in a back street, where the inhabitants have, possibly, no rooms to let."

After a little reflection Sterner said,

"Westerlind, you must take the trouble to try and fulfill my wish. In the street, the back part of the houses of which overlook the street where Mr. Von Spalden lives, perhaps you will be so lucky as to find for me a passable locality. Here is a rix-dollar for you, with which you can make yourself merry when you come back."

The Major made him a sign with the hand to go, and Westerlind murmured to himself as he went down stairs:—"It is easy to see, it is a matter of course, such a gentleman as my master does not wish any one to ob-

* See "Waldemar Klein," by the same authoress.

serve that he has any thing to do with such shabby people!"

Scarcely was the door closed, when Sterner threw the book far from him, measured the room with long steps, whistled an air from "Fra Diavolo," which was now and then interrupted with a "curse it! mere pride! bad sign!" &c.

At five o'clock the post-inspector, Von Spalden, was announced.

"He is welcome," said the Major to the waiter, and stepped forward to meet our good post-inspector, who, well shaved and in decent trim, and having his black coat on, which had been brushed with particular care, entered the room. With manifold bows and excuses the post-inspector lamented that he was not in a position to receive his respected guest, but that he hoped in a very short time to be able to do so.

"Why, heaven defend me!" answered Sterner, smiling, "remember, my dear Mr. Von Spalden, that I represent your daughter's suitor: you need make no difference on my account;—I, for my part, do not wish it, nor would my cousin Constantine, I am sure."

"You are a great deal too good, Major, but permit me to assure you that it is impossible for me to receive you in my present abode, in whatever character you may come. The incident of this morning," stammered the post-inspector, much embarrassed, "has made known to you the state of our finances, as my wife tells me, we"—he coughed, his pride suffered terribly—"briefly, Major Sterner, we are already much indebted to you."

"In this case," replied the Major, as though he had not heard the post-inspector's last sentence, "I must start from here without having effected my object; for I have promised my cousin to deliver his portrait myself, and to see, and speak with the young lady."

This was what Mr. Von Spalden by no means aimed at. He had only wished to reconnoitre, if the proxy's reception could not be put off until he could procure another house, which would be more in accordance with his present improved position in life; but when he heard the Major's intention, and could no longer expect to deliver the portrait himself, he determined to abide by the plan which he and his wife had fixed upon, namely, to invite the Major for the following afternoon. Acting upon this resolution he began with—

"If then, sir, you are so unprejudiced, as not to mind how miserably we are at present lodged, and how poorly you will be served, my family and I would consider it a great honor if you would visit us to-morrow afternoon."

"Now, I rejoice," answered Sterner, "that Mr. Von Spalden has done with this,

to my eyes, truly false shame; but if I might be permitted to have a voice in the matter, let there be no ceremony whatsoever on my account."

The post-inspector would willingly have put several questions, as for instance, what kind of a service it was, for which the above-named Sterner was so highly commended in the will; what brought about the, to Rudolph's heirs, so detrimental a meeting with him, &c.; but the post-inspector felt that these queries must unfortunately be deferred, for with all his agreeable and affable manners, the Major possessed a something which commanded respect to such a degree, that the post-inspector did not dare to ask any questions on so short an acquaintance. He therefore took his leave. As the post-inspector withdrew, the Major began again to pace up and down the room, nor did he stop until Westerlind entered and informed his master that he had succeeded in getting the wished-for lodgings. They were all ready, so that he could move there that evening, if he wished it.

CHAPTER VI.

A MUSICAL SOIREE.—A COLD BATH.

WHILE the post-inspector was paying his visit to the Major, the ladies were engaged in not less important affairs. Mrs. Von Spalden consulted her daughter on the all-important question, how they should manage to procure for the next evening a respectable supper.

"For only think, dear child, every thing will appear so miserable," said the mother.

"I earnestly trust," replied Augusta, "that the Burgomaster will help my father with money, it will be easy then to free ourselves of all embarrassments."

"But, ah!" sighed the mother, as she looked round the room and shook her head. "How wretched all this looks! however, it can't be helped; he is sure to come. At all events, you must put up new curtains, and arrange the things to the best advantage."

"I am quite convinced, mamma," answered Augusta, "that he who has already shown himself so much our friend will not mind how we live, if we receive him well, and set before him something which will not put our culinary science to shame."

"Yes, my dear, that is just what I consider of the greatest importance, and that could easily be obtained, if we had money; but one item which is indispensably necessary, I scarcely know how to get, that is—game."

"Yes, truly that is a difficult matter," said Augusta, "there are so many people about here who purchase game, that we can hardly

expect to procure any on such short notice."

"We *must* have game; so that is fixed, and I think I have hit upon the plan by which we can get it; namely, that you should go very early to-morrow morning into the country, to Pehr Nilsson, who used to serve us in our better days, and is a capital shot. He will do any thing for you, and if you go to him yourself, I am convinced he will give you whatever game he may have in his house; or, should he have none, that he will procure some for us before the evening. Will you go, dear Augusta? If you start about eleven o'clock, it will be time enough; a good walk on the ice will not only be healthy, but agreeable."

"I will certainly go, mamma, and do my best," answered Augusta, who was always obliging and sweet-tempered.

The post-inspector now returned, spoke of his visit, and the favorable impression Sterner had made on him,

"He is a first-rate fellow, that Sterner; what a splendid man the heir himself must be, if he can send such an ambassador!"

The post-inspector and his wife now talked over a great number of things, settled, guessed, and wondered over many more, and it was not until late in the evening of this eventful day, that the happy couple retired to rest, with thankful hearts and cheering hopes.

With a mixed feeling of joy and sorrow, Augusta entered her little chamber. The first object which her eyes fell upon was her piano-forte; it stood opposite to the only window which gave light to this monastic looking cell. In her opinion it was not the least happy event of the day, that she had been allowed to keep her dear instrument. How many long, sorrowful evenings, when her thoughts flew back to the past, and recalled the bright visions of childhood, or of riper years, or, as her thoughts dwelt on the present, when she saw herself deserted by the young companions of her own age, when she even felt a little the loss of those butterflies, who once fluttered round her, but now had left the hidden flower; how often, I say, had not her piano been her only pleasure, her only comfort; for her father's excellent library had gone the same way as his other property.

Now in the quiet, happy thought, that circumstances no longer demanded this sacrifice to her filial love, she placed one of the only two chairs the room could boast of before her piano, opened it and struck a few chords. Augusta's unusual musical talent had been carefully cultivated, and in her sweet, rich, flexible voice, there was something indescribably enchanting.

After a while she began her favorite songs; and, always excited by music, she played and sang with the greatest enthusiasm of deep

feeling. Suddenly she imagined that strange tones mingled with hers. She let her small well-shaped fingers rest on the notes, and listened with intense attention. All was still, she thought it must have been a freak of her own imagination, and began a new song; but now she distinctly heard how the deep, full tones of a man's voice accompanied her. This could be no fancy; but from whence could the voice come? At their neighbor's, the goldsmith's, there was no one whom she could suspect of such gallantry. Her curiosity being excited, Augusta went to the window, but immediately stepped back in consternation as she beheld at the window, directly opposite, a tall, manly figure, in the clear moonlight. The stranger made a slight inclination and disappeared.

She hastened to let down the window-blinds, a thing she often forgot to do, for as her room looked into their neighbor's courtyard, she knew that no inquisitive glance would watch her from the goldsmith's best rooms. Astonished at what she had seen and heard, she shut down her piano, shoved her chair toward the stove and tried to restore her perplexed thoughts.

The unknown singer, the stranger, such as her fancy painted him, when he offered her mother aid at the post-office, and the Hamburg suitor swam before her mind's eye with that magic brightness which imagination often lends to her pictures.

"Oh that it were morning!" sighed her female curiosity, "I shall then see the original of the one, and the portrait of the other; but who in the world can the goldsmith's guest be?"

After a refreshing sleep, Augusta rose early the next morning, and at nine o'clock was ready to begin her journey over the ice to Pehr Nilsson's. In a pretty, well lined mantle, and pink silk bonnet, with large black veil, which contrasted well with her neatly arranged light brown hair, she set off over the frozen and well swept river.

She was now on her way home, and that she had gained her point was evident for Pehr Nilsson's ragged boy followed her with a black cock and a hare over his shoulders. Lightly and gayly Augusta was hurrying forward, when she suddenly heard a loud shouting behind her, and on quickly turning round she beheld a sleigh upset, from which the horse had broken loose, and was now running toward her at full speed. The river was small, which made her position the more perilous. She sprang as fast as she could to the right.

"To the left, to the left," cried a voice lower down the stream, where some young men were amusing themselves with skating; but seized with that confusion of mind so common to women on occasions of danger, she did not hear the warning cry, and continued to run until she suddenly fell up to

the waist into a small opening in the ice, which had been broken near the bank.

Our poor heroine was undeniably in one of the most unpleasant situations in which a young lady can be placed.

She made hasty attempts to regain the edge of the slippery ice, and was on the point of giving up her efforts, so entirely had fright paralyzed and cold benumbed her tender limbs, when a powerful arm seized her round the waist, raised her up, and carried her a little way toward the town. She looked up at her preserver, but immediately closed her eyes again, for she fancied she recognized their neighbor at the goldsmith's.

"Fear nothing," said he, gently; "as soon as we reach the first dwelling I shall procure proper assistance for you."

He kept his word; as soon as they were under cover, and he had laid his lovely burden on a bed which the benevolent peasant woman pointed out to him, he hastened away, without asking a single question.

A messenger was forthwith dispatched to the post-inspector's to announce the event, and in the greatest uneasiness her mother arrived with dry clothes. Except the passing fright, Augusta was, thanks to her good constitution, perfectly well after her cold bath. She and her mother racked their brains in vain to think whom they had to thank for such effectual help out of danger by no means insignificant. They could discover no clew to their wishes, so hastened home, Augusta to take a few hours' rest, and Mrs. Von Spalden to begin her arrangements for the coming entertainment.

The shades of evening had already begun to fall when the expected guest arrived.

"Major Sterner knows my wife already," said the post-inspector. "This is my daughter! Augusta, my child, you see, in this gentleman, the proxy of your noble intended."

It was a mercy for Augusta that the darkness hid her embarrassment and the deep red which dyed her cheeks, for at the first words the stranger uttered she became aware that the singer, her preserver, and Sterner, were one and the same person. She would not recognize him in the first character, but with true feminine tact she thanked him for the powerful aid she had received from him during her disagreeable adventure of the morning.

"But permit me to ask, what lucky chance led you so opportunely in that direction?" added Augusta.

"I was enjoying my favorite amusement, skating, when I was shocked by observing the danger which threatened you. I called several times to you to go to the other side, but unfortunately you did not hear me till too late: I was then so near that I speedily had the happiness of being of use to you."

"It really seems as though fate had decreed that this gallant officer should always

be near when want and danger threaten us," said the post-inspector, in a complimentary tone, and shaking him by the hand;—"our debt to him is already greater than we shall ever be able to repay."

"Not another word on the subject, I pray you," said Sterner; "let us rather speak of the circumstances which have brought me here."

Augusta now entered with lights; and the Major taking something from his waistcoat-pocket, went toward her.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PORTRAIT.

"PERMIT ME," said Sterner, presenting her the portrait,—“permit me to deliver to you the miniature of my cousin, Constantine Sterner, your unknown admirer.”

Embarrassed and trembling she took it, and held it toward the light. Her glance at the portrait gave sign of by no means so much feeling as that which was evinced by Sterner as he stood watching her. The silence of death reigned in the room. The post-inspector and his wife had withdrawn to the other end of the apartment.

The features, which seemed to smile upon Augusta from the picture, were extremely soft. They had a cheerful expression, but nothing high-minded or commanding. The clear blue eyes beamed with goodness; the ruddy glow on his cheeks spoke of health and strength, and round the fresh lips played a captivating smile. In short, it was the face of an every-day good-looking young man, such as one often meets.

"Well, what do you think of it?" demanded Sterner, with a slight tinge of impatience in his voice and gesture.

"Oh, it is a very nice face; but he must be very young."

"Three or four and twenty years, or thereabouts," answered Sterner: "I think it has your approbation?"

"I can not say with perfect truth that it has. To speak sincerely—but pray don't be offended—it does not appear to me that these fine, effeminate features are calculated to inspire that feeling of respect, without the existence of which, it is impossible for me to think of a more tender sentiment."

"He who shall have the happiness of pleasing Miss Von Spalden must not appear then in our ordinary material form," answered Sterner, with a laugh, it was difficult to discover whether of satisfaction or annoyance, at Augusta's declaration.

"You quite misunderstand me, Major Sterner," continued Augusta, "if you think I am one of those sentimental novel heroines, who form ideas of chimerical perfection, and who consider it impossible to find the quali-

ties which they expect in their future husbands elsewhere than in beings equally fanciful as themselves. I do not belong to this class, and I trust never to get such a simpleton for a husband!"

Augusta uttered this with such emphasis, that no one could doubt that she felt the truth of what she said; and over Sterner's manly features a deep glow spread itself, while he assured her, with a graceful bow, that he felt convinced of it.

"But, nevertheless," continued he, after a short pause, "even should his pretensions not be very considerable, could they not be deemed satisfactory," and he smilingly pointed to the portrait, "particularly when we may add the not very disagreeable certainty that he possesses sixty thousand Hamburg marks."

"In this case," said Augusta, laughing, "I must confess, to use your own words, that I am not sufficiently *material* to be influenced by gold in my choice of him who is to be my better-half through life. I should not, perhaps, say this, but your cousin himself has begged me to be candid. I therefore venture freely to declare to you, that if I had any choice in the matter it should be the worth of the man, and not the conditions annexed to the will, which would decide our fate."

It now appeared to the post-inspector and his wife high time to mix in the conversation.

"I hope," said Mr. Von Spalden, as he cast a severe look upon his daughter, "that the Major is aware it is the fashion with young ladies to make a long preamble before they come to the point."

The mother took the portrait in her hand, and could not praise the engaging young man sufficiently. The conversation became general, and Sterner related in the course of the evening, how his cousin, in consequence of certain family affairs, had three or four years ago traveled to America, where, during a journey into the interior of the country, he had become acquainted with Rudolph Von Spalden. Notwithstanding their difference of age, an intimate friendship sprang up between them, which was grounded on mutual esteem and confidence. As countrymen, they felt it a great charm to be able to communicate their feelings and opinions in their mother-tongue. They traveled for several months together, and the tie of friendship which already bound them together, was, if possible, strengthened when Constantine at a tiger hunt saved Mr. Von Spalden's life, at the imminent risk of his own.

"He then persuaded my cousin to remain with him," continued he. "They left the United States together, and Mr. Von Spalden conveyed his considerable property to Hamburg, where he settled himself, with, however, the fixed intention, as soon as his health should have improved (as it had suffered

much from his long residence under the tropical sun), in company with Constantine, to have set out on his journey back to his native land. This hope was not, however, realized; his health and strength daily failed, and as he saw himself so near the narrow boundary between time and eternity, he drew up, a few weeks before his death, the will which has now come to light. I myself was about that time on a little pleasure trip, and was so fortunate as accidentally to meet my cousin in Hamburg, where I spent a few months. On my journey homeward he gave me the commission to deliver his portrait to the young lady who was destined to be his companion through life, and I was charged also to beg, if she freely consented to give it, a likeness of her beautiful features, so that he also might be able to form some slight idea of his unknown intended."

"I shall not, therefore," added Major Sterner, "expect an answer this evening, as the matter is of too great importance to my cousin to be decided in a moment. Perhaps in three weeks, when I return from West Gothland and Schonen, whither I am obliged to go, partly on my own account, and partly to arrange about buying a property for my cousin, I may hope to have an answer."

When Sterner had finished his narrative, together with these little particulars of his errand, they sat down to supper, and separated, as it seemed, pleased with each other.

After arranging a few little household matters for the evening, Augusta went into her chamber; the first thing she set about was to put down the window-blinds. She naturally cast her eyes opposite to the goldsmith's drawing-room: all was perfectly dark there. "He must be out," was the conclusion to which Augusta first came. "Or could he have been sleepy, and gone to bed?" At this idea she felt, without being able to account for it, a curious sensation, not unlike that which is experienced when one is angry at something. She stood awhile with the blind-string in her hand, then, inch by inch, she let it slowly glide through her delicate fingers. At length it could go no further. The roller rested upon the window-ledge, and with a sigh she dropped the cord.

"He is a very agreeable man, this Sterner," said she, as she held his cousin's portrait to the light. "Oh, if this picture only had his features!" She breathed this wish in a discontented tone, as she left the innocent portrait in her work-table drawer, and flung some skeins of thread and a needle-book over it; she then seated herself at her piano, to console herself.

She had scarcely begun a song which harmonized with her melancholy tone of mind, when her neighbor's melodious voice again blended with hers.

"Ah, he is then up!" murmured she, agreeably surprised. "But how thankful I

am that I put down the blind so soon; he did not see me, and now it is impossible to do so." Her good sense bade her give up singing, so, slowly, she sought repose; but, for the first time in her life, she did not find it. Again she thought, "Why is it not he?"

His image incessantly floated before her mind; she tried not to see it; she determined to sleep; she shut her eyes, but it became only the more distinct and clear; in fact, the more eager she was to banish it, the more it set at defiance all her efforts. At length, toward morning, the images of Sterner, the heir, uncle Rudolph, and the will swam before her thoughts in that confused jumble which precedes the period when body and mind sink to rest; then murmuring, and scarcely audibly, "Do I love him?" sleep stole over her closed eyelids.

Two or three days passed in the same manner. Sterner paid his visit in the evening at the post-inspector's, and even captivated the old couple with his lively and amusing conversation. When the little party had separated, and Augusta had quickly drawn down the blind of her room, she often longed to give vent to her feelings in the sweet tones of music, but every time she approached the piano a voice within her held her back.

On the morning of the fourth day the Major appeared before them in his traveling costume.

"Do not entirely forget me, Miss Augusta," said he, on taking leave, with deep feeling in the tone of his full rich voice.

She was silent; but her looks answered, "Never!" with an earnestness more eloquent than words.

Mrs. Von Spalden cast her eyes down, and the post-inspector knocked his pipe harder than usual against the stove. Half an hour later the Major had started in the diligence.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIANCÉE.

THE room into which we now introduce our reader, is a large apartment hung with the finest Parisian tapestry, in the house of Judge Stolzenbeck's widow at F—.

Splendid pictures, modern pier-glasses, handsome chandeliers, and other choice furniture announced, at the first glance, the possessor's love of show, to which, however, was united the most perfect taste.

In the centre of the room, which was covered with a handsome carpet, knelt a young girl in mourning, before a large map, which she had spread out. She drew different lines with a needle upon it, which her eyes carefully followed. At length she made a small mark, and said, sadly—

B

"He is there; oh, how far, far away!"

A little while afterward she rolled the large map up, and unfolded a small traveling map of Sweden. On this also she drew lines with her needle, and counted one mile, two, three and a half, and so on, leaning her fair head on a delicate white hand, which shone with brilliant rings.

"What in all the world have you before you, my dear girl?" asked an elderly lady, in a morning dress, who had just entered the room, and now approached the lovely girl, who was on her knees.

"Oh, I see!" said she, casting a hasty glance at the map. "You are at your old occupation again. I might have guessed that; but why should it be on the ground to-day?"

"The sun dazzles my eyes at the window," replied the damsel.

"Then why do you plague your eyes? You have seen a hundred times where Hamburg is, and as often I have told you, that you must have patience. Let this tiresome map alone!"

"My dear aunt, I have seen a hundred times where Hamburg is; it can not be more surprising to you, if I look for it a hundred and one times, than it is to me that you should repeat the same remark so often; but just now I was only looking to see how far it was between here and Helsingborg. I have counted up the number of miles between each inn, and can not imagine what keeps the Major so long on the way. It is more than a fortnight since I saw his name in the Helsingborg paper among the new arrivals."

"But, dear Henrietta," replied the aunt, "with the slightest reflection, you will perceive that Major Sterner has not only gone to Hamburg to fetch your future bridegroom's portrait, but may have possibly, on his return, some matters of his own to attend to, which may take up his time, before he comes here to satisfy your impatience."

"You are too annoying, aunt, with your eternal moralizing," answered Henrietta, with unfeigned vexation in her voice and manner. "But I do think the Major might, as a future relation, show a little more attention in his behavior."

"And ought not you, then, dearest Henrietta, to remember that you owe the same attention toward those who are already connected to you by the nearest ties of relationship?" said the aunt, in a slight tone of reproach.

"Pardon me, dear aunt Elizabeth," said Henrietta, somewhat moved. "But," added she, "this Sterner, whom I am so impatiently expecting, reminds me of a story, which you no doubt can tell, and which relates to the cause of his journey into foreign countries. How was it? if you can recollect, dear aunt, pray let me hear it; you narrate

so well and amusingly, and time passes so indescribably fast, if any one shortens it for me in this manner."

Now, it is true, Henrietta could repeat this story on her five fingers, but as she had offended her kind aunt, and knowing her weak side, she chose this means of softening her. For she knew the good lady soon recovered her temper, if any one asked for an anecdote out of the many with which her memory was stored.

"I will willingly, my child," began the aunt.

"It was in the winter of 1830. A friend, who happened to be in Stockholm at the time, told me what I am now going to repeat to you. A Mrs. Von T—— had spent the winter in the capital. Before her departure she gave a farewell ball, and among the guests invited was Baron Von K—— and his wife, and Major Sterner, who, at that time, was a Lieutenant of Dragoons. Now the *on dit* was, that Sterner paid the Baroness Von K—— more attention than the world considers decorous; other reports were, again, that he was only a friend of the poor young woman, who did not find herself happy in her marriage. Be this as it may, friend or lover, he danced the first waltz with her. Youth, which is never cautious, particularly when dancing is in question, might learn from this a warning.

"Baroness Von K—— did not feel well before she went to the ball; but, notwithstanding this, she waltzed violently, the consequence was, she broke a blood-vessel. She never quite recovered, and died in 1832, in W——, while traveling home. The day after the ball, Baron Von K—— met Lieutenant Sterner in the society of several officers. Baron Von K—— and Sterner had until now been good friends; but the groundless reports which had been spread, so excited the former, that though, in truth, he had no cause to reproach Sterner, he now openly did so, making use of the most disgraceful expressions. Those present tried to appease him; but the Baron set no bounds to his rudeness. He insulted Sterner in the highest degree, and ended with a challenge.

"Stern, although remarkable for his skill in the use of every kind of arms, and distinguished among his companions for his strength and courage, did not accept the challenge. He possessed the esteem of his superior officer, and the friendship of most of his comrades, and no one doubted that it was his well-known principles and hatred of dueling, and not cowardice, which had influenced him in declining the Baron's challenge. Nevertheless, the fiat of prejudice was against him. He would not yield his principles, and was too proud to hear of a reconciliation, which every one wished to bring about. He asked for permission to leave the army, and received the same with

the rank of Major, whereupon, he soon quitted the country. Since then, I think nothing more has been heard of him, until your Constantine, as he writes, met him at Hamburg."

"Do you know, aunt, I am quite curious to see him," began Henrietta; "but only because Constantine has praised him so much; moreover, he might remain for ever with the portrait in Raynarök, if my intended himself would make his appearance. But to talk of something else: dear aunt, I have one grief which exceeds all others. Mama says that she intends to purchase Ulriksdal again, which is now for sale, with the ten thousand dollars which uncle Rudolph has left her, and her own previous property. Oh, dear aunt, how tiresome it would be to live in the country, particularly during the winter."

"My child," answered the aunt, "when one thinks of marrying, one must accustom oneself to consider pleasure as a secondary, not a principal object. Of all things you must prepare yourself for this."

"A thing I shall do most unwillingly, it is not to be denied," laughingly replied Henrietta. "But to return to Ulriksdal; you were of course very often there, aunt?"

"Yes, dear child! Many a happy hour I have spent there, when your respected grandfather, the Major, possessed it. My brother was then engaged, and I was betrothed to Gustavus, the eldest son of the house. He fell in the campaign of 1788, and"—here she wiped the tears from her eyes—"all my happiness was buried in his grave. Since then I have not thought of marrying, not but what I have had many offers. I have lived in your parents' house, and hope to remain with your mother till the Lord shall call me to be united to him who has gone before me."

"Poor aunt Elizabeth," sighed Henrietta, "yours is a long joyless life indeed! Heaven preserve me from one like it! But, dear aunt, who can that be who is coming this way?" Henrietta stood at the window as she said these words. "Truly, an elegant-looking young man! Can this be at length our expected Major?"

"Yes, it must be he," said the aunt, who was looking over her niece's shoulder. "He looks so foreign." "Hush, hush!" cried both at once, as they listened with intense attention.

The stranger asked some one in the street if this was Mrs. Stolzenbeck's house, and as he was answered in the affirmative, he came in. Henrietta had scarcely time to put her ringlets in order before the glass, when the door opened, and the long-expected visitor entered. Aunt Elizabeth, remembering that her toilet was not very elegant, had betaken herself to another room.

"Have I the honor of seeing Miss Stol-

zenbeck?" asked our old acquaintance of L—, with a graceful bow.

"Ye-s," replied Henrietta with a pretty courtesy. "Major Sterner, I presume, the cousin of my—my *fiancé*, Constantine?"

"Who shall soon be yours, if I can have the pleasure of realizing his hopes," said Sterner, as he carried Henrietta's pretty hand to his lips. "However, I shall be most happy if in advance you would consider our cousinship as settled."

"So be it, cousin," said Henrietta; "I shall at once claim relationship, so that you may answer me a host of questions. What is Constantine doing? Is he not changed? Does he long to get home? How soon will he have arranged his affairs? And for the fifth and last, have you got his portrait with you?"

"The first of these questions I can answer to your satisfaction. He is well, perfectly the same, longs extremely to be at home, and will arrive here within three or four months; but now comes the last point."

"Ah, the portrait," interrupted Henrietta; "you surely have not lost it, cousin Alexander?"

"Not exactly that, but unfortunately something which is not much better. Can you forgive me, sweet Henrietta, if I confess that I have forgotten it in my desk, which Constantine himself is going to bring with him?"

"Indeed," answered she, nearly crying, "I don't know how I can excuse such carelessness. I wish you could only imagine what pleasure I expected from it; but what is to be done? the thing can not be helped, so I suppose I must forgive you," and she gave him her hand as a sign of reconciliation.

"I well know how to value your kindness," said the Major, "and am delighted to be able to show you that I have not forgotten another article which Constantine sends his charming lady love," and with these words he presented to her a red morocco case.

"Oh, how beautiful! how extremely good Constantine is, and you, my dear cousin Alexander, how kind you are not to have forgotten these magnificent things as well as the portrait!" With these exclamations she held in the one hand a costly chain, and in the other a solid pair of fashionable gold bracelets. She quickly flung the first round her neck, and Sterner gallantly helped her to clasp the latter.

"Oh, how lovely! how very beautiful!" cried she with delight, as she beheld her truly charming figure reflected in the glass—"I must run and show them to mamma! But, dear me, how forgetful I am!" cried she, perplexed, "how mamma will scold me, when she hears that I have been chatting a whole half an hour with my new cousin, in-

stead of letting her know of his arrival! But you will be our guest at dinner? Mamma will be delighted, and, of course, I also."

"I consider myself most happy to be able to obey your commands, and fulfill my own wishes at the same time," said Sterner, with that courtesy which men of the world know so well how to adopt, when they are talking little nothings to ladies, which do not, or can not, lead to a more solid conversation. With a few light steps Henrietta left the room.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MAMMA.

If in the fashion you'd appear,
Scarcely defined your smile must be;
A something, verging on a sneer,
That people may your satire see.

LENNART.

THE smile disappeared from the Major's lips as soon as he was alone. He looked almost with pity after the receding fair one.

"Very sweet," murmured he to himself; "a pretty doll, in whose society one could pass away a few hours very pleasantly, which were not engaged in the more serious occupations of life. She is good-natured and frank, but also vain and childish; a mediocre subject for a mediocre wife. I hope that you may be happy, Constantine, but were I you, I would not seek my happiness *there*. Perhaps, however, I, with my exalted expectations, may never find a wife who can realize my dreams of matrimonial bliss; the image of *my* ideal may only live in my imagination. Where is the woman, who, setting aside all selfishness, all trifles, all caprice, quite devotes herself to her husband; who only places her happiness on him to whom she dedicates her true, pure nature, inexhaustible riches for the noblest enjoyments of life—who will also share his sorrows with him—who never knew, never loved that pitiful vanity which amuses itself with empty finery? Vanity! vanity! you are the stumbling-block of women! In you how many noble hearts have found their ruin, how many virtues their grave!"

"How easily this young girl who has just left me dried her tears, how perfectly her sorrow at the loss of her lover's picture was stifled, by her great delight at the bracelets and chain, as she smiled with admiration of her own image in the glass. Such a tribute to vanity is too great! Poor Constantine! you are happy as long as you are blind; but I pity you when your eyes shall be opened!"

"Yet, there is one woman who, perhaps, resembles the picture which my fastidious imagination has painted of her, who could win my entire love, and who could realize my dreams of happiness—a precious jewel, which could possibly pass through every trial of its genuineness—Augusta!" Here Ster-

ner was silent; a sigh closed the sentence. Just as, deeply wrapped in his own thoughts, he was drumming on the window-pane, Henrietta returned along with her mother.

Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck was a woman of the world—at least, this was the prevailing opinion in the good town of F—. She was not only considered to possess understanding and taste to a high degree, but, what was much more important, she passed as a pattern in the art of assuming that distinguished and easy air, that outward manner which is so charming, and to imitate which the ladies of her circle in vain tormented themselves. Her way of entering a room was esteemed faultless, and was recommended as an example by all husbands to their wives, and by all mothers to their daughters.

She greeted our hero with one of those so often-admired and captivating courtesies.

"It gives me great pleasure, Major Sterner, to see you in my house," said she graciously, seating herself with much dignity on the sofa; she carefully put the folds of her elegant morning-gown in order, and then motioned to her guest to take the seat opposite her.

Sterner now delivered in due form his cousin's remembrances, said how glad he was to have had an opportunity of making the acquaintance of Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck and her charming daughter, and spoke of his travels, and of every thing he thought might captivate the attention of his auditors.

After a pause, which was long enough, to admit of a new subject being started, Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck said, "Permit me to ask you, Major, if you ever saw my brother during your stay in Hamburg?"

"I did not often have that pleasure," answered he; "your brother's state of health deprived him of all society, particularly toward the last also."

"Without doubt you have seen his ridiculous will?"

I was present when it was opened?"

"This will was curious, more than curious. If you would not consider it a want of delicacy, might I take the liberty of asking if you were much acquainted with the favorite who so well understood how to make the singular old man arrange things so greatly to his advantage?"

"He is my cousin and friend," replied the Major, and the glowing red on his cheeks, as well as the tone of his voice showed that this question was highly displeasing to him. "I venture to affirm, madam," added he, "and I suppose you will put some faith in my word of honor, that he knew as little of the contents of the will as you or I."

A considerable drawing down of the upper lip, and some frowns on the usually smooth brow, indicated that, notwithstanding the Major had given his word of honor, yet his assertion was quite opposite to Mrs. Von

Stolzenbeck's inward conviction. And with all her vaunted worldly wisdom, she had not the power to hide this; for she said, with a meaning smile, "At my time of life, one has a little more knowledge of the world, Major!"

It was with difficulty Sterner prevented himself from laughing in the face of the good lady, with her imaginary sagacity; however, he bowed respectfully, and answered nothing.

As Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck found that her guest could give no satisfactory answers on the only subject which at present interested her, she got up, leaving Henrietta to entertain him, and, after she had politely invited him to dinner on this and every other day during his stay in F—, she left the room, pleading as excuse some household matters.

"I suppose you will remain some days here, cousin?" began Henrietta, whose usual eloquence had been curbed by her mother's presence.

"Only one," answered he. "To-morrow morning, very early, I start for Schonen, to visit a clergyman named Svallenius, who was my tutor in childhood and youth."

"How tiresome!" cried Henrietta. "On Monday we have a ball, which commences with a concert, and I really would be delighted if you could remain over that time. Is it not possible?" asked she, with such a charming smile, that it needed Sterner's hardened heart to be able to withstand it.

"Quite impossible! Do not doubt that if I could fulfill your wish, you would have no cause to persuade me, but I sent my servant on with the hounds from L—to the parsonage at Wallaryd, and my old friend would be in the greatest uneasiness if I did not arrive on the day I fixed in my letter."

Henrietta was much hurt that the sending on of hounds, and the uneasiness of an old parson, should be proffered as an apology for not accepting an invitation which she had condescended to give; yet she was too proud to waste her eloquence on him. She was silent, and immediately after the Major took his leave, to change his dress for dinner.

In the evening there was company at Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck's; it is true, not a very numerous circle, but it was rather a mixed party. This was also the case with the conversation, which was carried on in three different divisions. The group which the gentlemen formed at one end of the room, eagerly discussed the question, who would be elected burgomaster on the ensuing month. This had long been a subject of the deepest meditation to the good citizens. In the half-circle of married ladies round the tea-table, an elderly lady was engaged in explaining to the others a wonderful discovery, which well deserved to be tried, namely, a mode of restoring to rancid butter the taste of fresh. And the receipt, which she gave,

could be depended upon, for she had read it in the newspaper. The young girls all assembled together round the cheerful fireside, and vied with each other in chatting about the coming ball, and every subject connected with it. Sterner wandered from one set to the other, like a spirit which was condemned to live in three different elements, all alike striving against his nature. He fidgeted and fretted, till at length the longed-for "Dinner is on the table!" was announced, and the ladies and gentlemen betook themselves to the dining-room, there to discuss the good things before them. After the entertainment was over, Sterner, heartily tired out, escaped back to his own lodgings.

CHAPTER X.

SOCRATES AND XANTIPPE.

In his solitary study one evening late, sat the Rev. Mr. Svallenius, bending over a large folio volume, and surrounded with smaller books and manuscripts, the whole scantily illuminated by the modest light of a green and yellow wax candle. He was a man of about fifty years of age, of short and powerful stature, with an earnest but not disagreeable countenance, on which his quiet contemplative life had impressed the not-to-be-mistaken stamp of melancholy and indifference. His manner showed that inclination made it necessary for him to occupy himself with some subject which had little in common with those daily claiming the thoughts of a man at the head of a house and family.

About eight years before the period when the events of this narrative occurred, the Rev. Mr. Svallenius, after he had long and industriously exerted himself as a tutor to the young and rich sons of noble families, received the parsonage of Wallaryd. Often, but without paying much attention to it, Svallenius had read the eighteenth verse in the second chapter of the book of Genesis: "And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him."

But he never considered this text so earnestly as now, nor did he before feel the want of such a helpmate. And one he must have; but from whence should she come? Our good parson, who never in his life had a taste for any thing but solving profound theological and philosophical mysteries, could not condescend to the usual mode of thinking and acting which influence other men in such cases. He must marry, so far was clear; he perceived that if he did not marry he would be horribly tormented with the innumerable cares which are unavoidably connected with house-keeping, and particularly with house-keeping in the country. As

he had never paid any attention to husbandry, he was in the utmost embarrassment when the servants and laborers of the farm came to him to know how he wished the fallow-land, sowing, fencing, building, horses, cows, and sheep managed.

"Do as you think proper, and as you have done until now, my children," was the only answer he could give them; but a dim foreboding told him that the children would know how to make use of his ignorance. Svallenius had hardly been two months in the parish before he was so tired and weary of these entirely new matters, that he swore by all that was holy, before two months should pass, to take a wife, who would remove this load from his shoulders.

But day after day passed on without any result to these wise determinations. Svallenius could not see clearly how he was to get possession of such a treasure. He did not know if there existed a lady in his parish, who could have any pretensions to the title of Mrs. Svallenius, and to look beyond the village never entered his mind.

One day, during this critical state of affairs, he received a visit from a young student, the son of the deceased minister, who had had the parish prior to Svallenius. The young man begged to be allowed to preach some Sunday during his holidays at Wallaryd.

"I shall be most happy, Mr. Trasselin," answered the good minister, and the following Sunday was fixed on for the first appearance of the young clergyman.

"We do not live very far from this," said Trasselin, on taking leave, "and nothing would give us greater pleasure than to see you next Sunday afternoon; my mother's house, it is true, is not as it used to be, in the happy days when she was mistress of Wallaryd; but what we have we offer freely."

"I thank you, my young friend, and shall not fail to appear: I am surprised that I should have forgotten to have paid your mother a visit, but I shall certainly do myself this honor," answered he, and with a politeness and sprightliness most unusual to him, he accompanied young Trasselin to the door.

The reason why the good parson was so eager to accept the invitation was, that the thought had just struck him that his predecessor had left a daughter, who had the reputation of being extremely skillful and active in all household matters, as well as those connected with farming. It became, therefore, the fixed determination of the pastor, as he was preparing to start on Sunday, to propose for the girl. What her appearance was or what were her mental powers, were of little consequence, for in the course of the week he had argued with himself as follows:

"Svallenius, you are old; you can not expect a handsome wife; such a one requires attention, whereas you wish her to attend

you and to the house-keeping. Your only pleasure consists in being allowed to sit undisturbed and in peace in your solitary chamber. If you attain this aim, which is the principal object, you must not look for a pretty face, this is quite a secondary thing. Further, touching knowledge, you yourself possess enough of that; in your wife it would therefore be an unnecessary quality. A well educated lady will never do for the mistress of a large parsonage in the country. The idea of a literary education in a wife is always connected with visions of burnt soup, lumps in the broth, and many other disagreeables, which you sincerely hate. So, with the Lord's help, you will take a wife, brought up in the good old school, and none of your modern dolls, who delight in reading those trashy, rose-scented poetic annuals."

With these elevated ideas of the worth and value of refined ladies, our respected Svallenius arrived at the house of the widow Trasselin.

At the very entrance of the house, which was most carefully covered with sand and strewed with finely chopped fir twigs, he was received by the hostess, who, as round and cheerful looking as a Dutchwoman, came waddling forward to welcome him. He was introduced to the daughter of the house, Miss Christiana Trasselin, in the dining-room. In a solemn manner she held, with the very tip of her forefinger and thumb, her narrow-striped muslin dress, and accomplished three courtesies. The first consisted of an inclination of the head and the left knee; the two others, on the contrary, were executed with head erect and very low bendings of the right knee, together with a slow step backward. This ceremonious salutation, the pastor, as a future lover, returned with as many bows, while he respectfully brandished his hat, which he held in his right hand. If our good Svallenius had read and remembered Madame Lenngren's important warning,

"If a maiden thou hast met,
Brown-eyed, sharp-nosed, short, thickset,
With shrilly voice, and Silan high,
Avoid her, pray, with all thy might!"

Stina Trasselin (whose portrait this stanza correctly paints) would most likely never have become Mrs. Svallenius. But it was not to be supposed that the parson should have read any thing which had emanated from the pen of a lady.

How dearly he paid for this neglect, when he, after six weeks' courting, took his treasure home, and daily became more and more aware how little the peace and quiet, which he had so heartily longed for, harmonized with the harsh and quarrelsome character of his better half. It is true, on one point he had reason to be contented; he need not trouble himself in the slightest about the house-keeping, but I should not have advised

him to try it. Not without satisfaction he beheld how his domestic concerns continually improved under the never idle hands of the mistress of the house; but it all went forward with so much noise and bustle, that the poor man looked upon himself as a martyr. Every hour of the day he was disturbed in his meditations by mournful tones issuing from the work-room, which apprised him that the housewife was engaged in the active exercises of the method which she considered indispensably necessary, to lend wings to the work.

Did the terrible thought ever occur to him, to have and assert his own way, in opposition to his wife's, he must either have recourse to deceit, which was not in his nature, or he must boldly and in good earnest play the master of the house. The latter was to him, who loved peace so dearly, the most disagreeable thing that could happen, and in the highest degree repugnant to his feelings. He trembled if he had any thing to propose to his wife, which he suspected would not be to her taste, and her spirit of contradiction was never tired of tormenting her good husband, until his naturally soft disposition was roused up to a certain pitch, and broke loose, as a lake when violently agitated by the tempest, rushes at length over its smiling banks. When this happened, which was very seldom the case, Xantippe was forced to give in and submit. But this is enough. The reader is now not quite unacquainted with the house whither our hero intended to go, therefore we will return to the time when we left the pastor absorbed in his philosophical books, about seven years after his entrance into the holy bond of matrimony.

A frightful barking of dogs roused him from his meditations. He pulled his little worsted cap over one ear, and put the other to the window. The barking became louder and more angry.

"Is Hector mad!" murmured he between his teeth; "I verily believe the beast has got a hundred tongues."

He quietly took the wax-light in his hand and went into the hall. Three blows as loud as thunder assailed the bolted door; but the parson, who thought it might possibly be thieves, weighed in his own mind the critical fact, that the servants' hall was situated at the other end of the court-yard, and did not consider himself forced to undo the door in any haste, but roared as loud as he could—"Who is there?" The answer from without, in consequence of the frightful noise the dogs made, remained a secret to the host; only renewed and more violent knocking was to be heard. Svallenius just remembered that it was snowing fearfully, and he began to reflect it might perhaps be a poor traveler with his dogs, who sought shelter from the storm, especially as it was not usual for thieves

to give notice of their arrival in so noisy a manner. As soon as he had come to this conclusion, he shoved back the heavy bolts, and a tall figure presented itself wrapped in a blue cloak, from whose appearance it were difficult to say whether he were master or servant.

CHAPTER XI.

A LETTER AND PERPLEXITY.

THE stranger took off his fur cap, and bowing with becoming politeness, asked if it was the Rev. Mr. Svallenius himself who had kindly let him in.

"Yes, I am he! Do you come on any errand to me, my friend?" answered the pastor.

"Yes, with your permission, I bring first myself, then three sporting dogs, as many portmanteaus, and lastly a letter from my master, Major Sterner. All this your humble servant, Isaac Westerlind, has the honor to deliver over into your kind keeping."

"Very well, very well, that's another thing. Come in here, my friend, and take something to warm yourself, afterward we can quietly take care of the dogs, &c. Sterner, ay, my goodness, has he returned to Sweden, the dear youth?" said the minister to himself, as he took from a little cupboard a bottle and glass, which, together with some few other articles, he kept there in case of necessity. He poured out a glass of fine distilled brandy, which greatly revived the half-frozen Westerlind, whereupon he drew forth a letter, and the pastor after casting a shuddering look over his shoulder, to see if there was time enough to acquaint his wife with all these, of course to her, unwelcome guests, begged Westerlind to be seated, while he read the major's letter. It ran thus:

"My former esteemed tutor and friend. About three weeks after my return to Hamburg, I came to Sweden, and it is impossible for me to withstand any longer my earnest desire to see you again, after so many years' absence; and as I am now in treaty about a property for my cousin in the Wallaryd parish, there could be no better opportunity to attain both objects. Knowing that you married three years before I went abroad, and, therefore, that your establishment is no longer that of a bachelor, I do not hesitate to invite myself as the guest of my old respected friend and his amiable family, for eight or ten days. I feel the want to pour out my heart to one in whom I can confide, and to ask your advice on a subject, about which we can speak when we meet.

"What a sweet sensation must not he experience, who knows that, on his return to his long lost native land, the hearts of his beloved parents and dear relatives beat with

pleasure and impatient desire to see him, who is thus restored to his dear family, and who is convinced that there he will be embraced with true, disinterested love! But with the exception of an old uncle and yourself, I think, my dear friend, there is not another heart that thus beats for me.

"Left from my earliest youth alone, and thrown on the magnanimity or pity of others, was I, the fatherless and motherless, obliged to rely on myself. I except with gratitude, however, the happiest period of my life, namely, the five years that you, my worthy tutor, devoted to me with indefatigable care.

"I remember as distinctly as though it were but yesterday, how Baron Linden, after accompanying me to my father's grave (I was then only ten years old), took me home with him, and said, 'Do not be sad, my boy! I was a friend of your deceased father, and you shall now be my son.' He then called you, and his own son. 'You see here, Mr. Svallenius, a pupil, whom I as warmly recommend to your care, as I do my Gustavus. And you, Gustavus, see in Alexander Sterner, a friend who, I hope, will show himself worthy of the confidence I now place in him.'

"These words, as well as the remembrance of my noble guardian, have dwelt in my soul ever since. His career was short; I lost him at the time when a youth most requires advice, on his entrance into society, whose cold, calculating selfishness and hollow seducing exterior are equally dangerous to the inexperienced.

"His and your instruction and advice in earlier years have not been entirely thrown away upon me. Also the young, promising Gustavus, my best friend, soon followed his noble father. Peace be with him!

"Since then I have passed through many hard fights with Fate. In my younger years I felt the pressure of poverty and temptation, for you know that the little capital which the Baron set aside for me, only came into my hands as I became of age; it remained untouched until my departure for foreign countries. I have informed you from time to time of the events in my early life, but at present I have matters of too great importance to communicate, to intrust them to paper. Therefore I come myself, and on Friday, the 23d of February, will arrive in Wallaryd. In the mean time I recommend to your good wife's care my servant and dogs, who, I beg you will assure her, will supply her table with game not only during the time that I have the honor of being her guest, but also for the future. My hounds (you remember that hunting was always my hobby) are the most superior of their kind, and you know the weakness of sportsmen for these their favorites. Forgive me, therefore, if I particularly recommend them to you. I also pray you to beg your wife to

excuse all the trouble I am giving her; but as I have heard that the excuses of a husband never have so much weight with his wife as when they are offered in a becoming manner by a stranger, I reserve to myself the pleasure of thanking her on my own account, particularly as you, my old friend, unless a complete revolution has taken place in you, do not greatly understand how to win ladies.

"Well, here have I written a whole sheet full, as if we should not soon be able to speak to each other. Until then, farewell, my honored friend.

"Ever yours sincerely,

"A. C. STERNER."

It would be very difficult to picture the curious, often truly laughable expression, which now and then came over the usually grave and severe features of parson Svallenius while reading this epistle.

It is true he rejoiced at the hope of soon seeing his old favorite and pupil, for whom he had always retained the warmest interest; but how much bitter wormwood was mixed in this cup of pleasure! Ah! Svallenius distinctly saw beforehand that his dear better half would make him drink many a drop of it, for it was her greatest detestation to see strangers more than once a year, and then only on a certain day, and servants and dogs she could not endure.

As he read how Sterner hoped to be received as a guest by his "amiable" family, a feeling seized him very like shame and anger, and Westerlind's astonished ears were greeted with, "Yes, to the devil, you will soon leave off praising amiability, my poor Alexander." At the end of the letter, where Sterner says that Svallenius does not understand how to set about to win a lady's good graces, the much oppressed parson sighed deeply, and thought, "God grant that he may succeed better! For seven long years I have sought in vain for the key to this secret."

He sank in deep thought, which turned always to one single subject, the way he should tell his wife all this.

Two or three clearings of the throat from the forgotten Westerlind, reminded him that a speedy determination was necessary; at last, after the poor man had for a few minutes exerted every power of thought, he hit upon the idea of taking the servant for the present to the above-mentioned work-room in an outhouse. It was heated, and only occupied by a tailor who was about to turn the pastor's old gown, a very natural thing to take place with such a good housewife as Mrs. Svallenius; for the new gown was only brought forth on great occasions, and very important ceremonials. Well, into this quiet asylum Westerlind and the dogs were led, all four as hungry as wolves; but, notwithstanding the best inclinations, Mr. Svallenius

could not order any thing for them until he had had the momentous interview with his wife. He was happy, in the first place, to have brought his guests safely under shelter; and after he had resigned Westerlind to the tailor's care, with which poor men's arrangement Westerlind was mightily disgusted, he returned to accomplish the errand which lay as heavy as lead on his heart.

It may appear incredible that the events which we have just described should have escaped the attention of the watchful matron; but this is easily explained, if one will only remember that the hall which she and her maidens occupied, was situated on the opposite side of the pastor's room, and that the barking of half a score of dogs could scarcely drown the humming of the never-resting spinning-wheel.

In the centre of the room, before an old-fashioned stove, whose flames, sustained by bundles of brushwood, gave light to those at work, sat Mrs. Anna Stina Svallenius upon a well-stuffed chair, winding wool. On her left, sat the maid who attended the cattle, the dairy-maid, and the cook; on her right, the governess, chamber-maid, and nurse, each with a distaff before her, whose wheels turned round and round with indefatigable zeal. Close to the stove knelt two fair-haired boys in gray coats, who were engaged in making stars out of pieces of fir, and laying fresh brushwood on the gradually expiring fire.

"Do you hear nothing, Dora?" shrieked suddenly Mrs. Svallenius, so shrilly that the whole female assembly sprang from the seats in a fright, and broke their threads. The cook, to whom this question was addressed, hastily pushed the distaff from her, shook the blue chips from her apron, and stood gaping before the terrible housewife. "Well, now look there, you stupid piece of wood, what o'clock it is, and if it is time to set the broth on the fire?"

"It is three minutes to seven," answered Dora, when she had done as she was commanded.

"Take your work again until the three minutes have passed. Time is precious, one ought not to throw it away uselessly. You have plenty of rest when you are watching the water-gruel. It is too annoying," continued Mrs. Svallenius, turning to the governess: "that the clockwork has gone wrong. This getting up to look at the clock runs away with an immense deal of time, which could be so easily avoided if the hours struck. I have told Svallenius more than a hundred times that he should send for a clockmaker to clean the clock, so that it may strike again, but, heaven knows, if he would take the trouble to bestow a sensible word on the man. For seven long years I have spoken myself hoarse about all the things which should be done here, but he is, and will ever

remain, an uncouth blockhead. But, Peter and Martin, are you not ashamed of yourselves, boys? Are you throwing all the brushwood into the fire at once? Must I get up, eh?"

Trembling at the harsh voice of their mamma, the little ragged beings crept, the one under Dora's and the other under the nurse's chair; for, young as the tender sprouts were, they had had plenty of experience in regard to the vigorous manner in which mamma handled the rod. Therefore they took flight as fast as possible, in the hope that they might be forgotten by somebody else drawing off her attention.

At this moment, to the astonishment of every one, Mr. Svallenius entered the room.

CHAPTER XII.

A SCENE OF MARRIED LIFE.

What tones, what accents dire are these
I hear around,
That through our home resound?
The earth and all its seas
Tremble and quake,
The halls of Hymen shake.—EDDA.

MR. SVALLENIUS held both his hands over his ears, for the horrid humming of six spinning wheels was most repugnant to his auditory nerves. He then drew near to his wife, and said—

"I wish to speak a few words to you, my dear friend."

"Are you troubled with ear-ache that you hold them thus, and what news are they which you have to tell?" asked the lady sharply.

But the parson who already in thought fancied he heard the rushing of the coming storm, whose outbreak he so much feared, was no way inclined to make his communication in the presence of the servants. He therefore very modestly repeated his wish that his dear Stina would follow him to his room, and took his hands from his ears, notwithstanding it was torture to him.

"Well, what great news is this? you can surely have no secret to tell me. I must have this wool rolled off by this evening, and have no time to accompany you here and there. If you have any thing to tell me say it at once."

To gain patience the pastor looked round the room for his children, and perceived the dear little pledges of love stretching forth their heads from under the chairs.

"Are you playing hide-and-seek, my little ones?" said he kindly.

"I will teach them how to play at hide-and-seek, and that you shall see," screamed the angry mother: "I will soon show you into what holes the little knaves shall creep; they have destroyed all the brushwood. We shall soon have the pleasure of working in

the dark; for I don't know a single case of your having once thought of ordering those lazy clowns of servants to bring home brushwood and firewood, or that they should chop up a piece of dry wood. No, I, a poor woman, must see after every thing, both large and small."

Without answering a word to this tirade, the father went and drew his little darlings forth, gave them each an apple, which he took from his coat-pocket, then turning to his wife, said—

"Stina, time presses; I assure you the matter is of consequence."

If Mrs. Svallenius' curiosity had not striven against her obstinacy, she would neither have followed her husband, nor let the children off so easily; but, this once, she yielded to the original sin, and silently followed Mr. Svallenius.

"Well," said she, when the parson had carefully shut the door, "why this pomp? why this caution? If you have had a letter with bad news, or the like, tell it at once; but what are these portmanteaus which I see here?"

"It is nothing more nor less," answered Svallenius, who had determined to break the ice at once, "than that a certain Major Sterner, who was for five years my pupil, and a dear and valued friend of mine, a man whom I esteem most highly, that this friend is resolved—"

The parson's voice faltered here, and he coughed several times.

"Well, what has he resolved, or, rather what has his determination to do with me?" she angrily interrupted him.

"Very much, my dear, my dear Anna Stina, the good man intends to give us the pleasure of his company, as a guest in our house, for eight or ten days, and has, therefore, sent forward his servant and three sporting-dogs."

"What prank is this I hear?" cried the shocked matron, clapping both hands to her side; "to come here uninvited for eight or ten days! Send forward servant and dogs. Have you lost the small quantity of sense which the Lord mercifully granted you? A servant! excellent! Three dogs! your humble servant! a pretty set! No, Svallenius, I never would have taken you for such a perfect blockhead; but if you are so silly as to imagine that I shall consent to all this, you are mistaken, I can tell you."

"But, dear Stina," began the pastor, humbly, "how can you express yourself so absurdly? I did not send for the one or the other."

"It is quite the same; you have, at all events, received them—therefore permit me to say, that you are, and always will be, the most complete blockhead that ever disgraced a gown; but I will show you, that I will, that I can put the pack out of the house."

You have no doubt sent the lad over to the work-room, I could imagine that."

And with these words the exasperated housewife strode to the door with the pious intention of sending the uninvited visitors about their business; but the minister, who was bent upon saving his own and his wife's reputation before the strange servant, took her by the arm, and, and—the authoress is, indeed, embarrassed to find a true, and, at the same time, suitable expression; for no one can doubt that, inasmuch as it was Svalenius' design to remove his wife from the door, it was nowise in accordance with her character to submit to this good-naturedly when once she had determined to go out. What could our respected parson do to gain his object when he held his wife by the arm? Could he not have hurled her away, or pushed, drawn, or dragged her away? Fie, that would not do! Well, he—he—in short, he helped her away. By the drawing of her arm he at length transported her person from the door to the middle of the room. This happened, and no one could blame him for it.

"Oh, you cruel, you abominable man, do you ill-treat your wife, your lawful wife, because she will preserve her rights?" wept Mrs. Svalenius. "But it is of no avail! Anna Stina Trasselin, who, on account of her sins is obliged to bear the name Svalenius, is not one who will yield her rights. I will never permit your run-away school-boys and their dogs to remain in my house, you may rest assured of that!"

"Hear, Stina, be sensible! If I took you rather roughly by the arm, it was your own fault, because you showed resistance; but do not try my patience beyond the power of man to bear; let reason guide you for once."

"Never!" cried Xantippe.

"There, you are at last right," said the pastor; "but now I tell you, that I will have obedience! therefore, make no further objections, but accommodate yourself to circumstances, or else—" here he made a significant pause; the time was come, when the tide began to rise. The pastor felt that if something did not happen to effect its fall, it would overflow its banks, which, as we have already mentioned, usually happened when his wife had provoked him beyond measure.

He tried to govern himself, as he perceived of what great importance it was, particularly in the present state of affairs, to avoid all extremes. At this critical moment, his lucky stars caused him to turn his eyes upon the well-filled portmanteaus of the Major, which lay on the floor. These, whoever could have thought it! proved the happy means of turning aside the coming storm.

"Moreover, Stina," added Svalenius, who was certain he had found the talisman which would help him out of his dilemma; "moreover, this annoyance may be of some slight

use to you, for the matter must come on, come what may. Only consider, the young man comes from America, and those who have returned safely from such a journey seldom appear empty-handed;" here he indicated with his foot the source of his happy thought. "Only look at these; they corroborate what I have said. By my knowledge of the man and his feelings, I am certain, perfectly satisfied, that he would not have laid claim to our hospitality in this manner, if he did not intend to make good the trouble he will cause the hostess by a handsome present."

This was a string which might be struck without fear of causing discord, for, to her avaricious nature, Mrs. Svalenius united an extraordinary weakness for finery, and nothing could equal her great delight if she could surpass her lady acquaintances in the magnificence of her toilet. She thought with pleasure, the present might be something which neither the tax-gatherer's wife nor the attorney's, and perhaps not even the magistrate's wife had ever seen, much less possessed. In her mind's eye she distinctly saw her triumph at the marriages, christenings, and funerals where they would meet, how they all gathered round her, and only her, and with astonishment looked, beheld, admired, and envied. In consequence of this train of thoughts, her face gradually brightened, like the morning red on a beautiful, peaceful May-day. She thought it likely that her husband might be right for once in his life. She suddenly became quite amiable.

"Well, my Svalenius, you are not so stupid. You display in your conclusive argument a knowledge of mankind. You know the man's character, and, as he is your dear friend, it would be wrong of me not to receive him well. When is he coming?"

"On the twenty-third of this month, my treasure."

"That is the day after to-morrow, my dear Svalenius."

"Yes, my angel; but, in the mean time, his servant, a good-looking young man, and his quadruped traveling companions, are waiting for their supper."

"And they shall not wait in vain. This whole fuss might have been avoided, my dear, if you would not begin every thing that you have to do at the wrong end. If you had begun where you ended, I should not have said a word."

With these words Mrs. Svalenius withdrew, without slamming the door after her, her usual act; and, rubbing his hands with extreme delight, the minister wandered up and down his room, and said, smiling—

"After the thunder comes rain, said the blessed Socrates."

Westerlind, who knew nothing of the wisdom of Socrates, and who did not suspect

what a good genius watched over the satisfying of his bodily wants, said, instead of grace, when he shortly after prepared to fall upon a dish of steaming potatoes and a well-smoked ham—

"After rain our Lord sends sunshine."

CHAPTER XIII.

PERFECT TRANSFORMATION.

On the 23d of February, toward the afternoon, the pretty large hall in Wallaryd was transformed from a spinning-room to a nice agreeable dining-room. It is not to be denied that Mrs. Svallenius was a skillful and active mistress of a house; she had *Kaia Warg** at her finger ends, and could brew gooseberry wine as well as Mrs. Primrose, of laudable memory. No one who had seen the interior of the Parsonage a few days before, could now have believed it to be the same house. The table was arranged with the utmost care, the table linen dazzling white, and the viands capitally dressed; for although Mrs. Svallenius did sometimes make difficulties, she was celebrated for her good management: and then her beer! in the whole parish there was no one who could brew the like. The delicious drink stood clear and foaming in a large pewter tankard, which shone like silver from one end of the table. The matron herself was equipped in her smartest attire, and the children were neat and clean.

Nothing was wanted but the guest, and he did not keep them long waiting. At the first sound of the bell the Pastor hastened into the hall, and from thence even to the door; Mrs. Svallenius tripped after him, with an expression, oh! how different from that she put on when first she heard of Sterner's coming. The moment that Sterner sprang out of the sleigh and pressed his old friend and tutor to his heart, was for them both so great and true a happiness, that they entirely forgot Mrs. Svallenius, who stood a little behind in the snow, carefully holding up her brown silk gown, so that it should not get dirty, and waiting till it came to her turn to be noticed. Old Svallenius forgot at this happy moment all the troubles and annoyances which he had endured.

At length they recollected themselves; the minister introduced his wife, and the Major politely offered his hostess his arm, assuring her that nothing was more pleasing to him than to witness the happiness his old friend could not fail to enjoy as husband and father, when he had made so excellent a choice.

This, to her new and agreeable language, flattered Mrs. Svallenius extremely; she smiled obligingly, and hoped that the Major

would kindly excuse if things were not as nice as she should wish them to be for so esteemed and welcome a guest; "but we are delighted to have the pleasure of Major Sterner's company in our house, such as it is."

"My dear Mrs. Svallenius, you quite embarrass me with your great kindness; I shall have to go on my knees in the middle of the snow to beg pardon for the boldness with which I, as a stranger, claimed your hospitality."

"Pray do not speak thus, dear Major," answered Mrs. Svallenius, and led her visitor, as he was, in his traveling-dress, to the dining-room, where the little boys stood, in their Sunday's best, on each side of the door; and, according to directions, scraped a sort of bow to the stranger.

"Ah, brother Svallenius, you have here a most agreeable diversion when you are tired of poring over your books. Pretty lively lads," said the Major, as he took the youngest in his arms and kissed both after the mamma had duly wiped their mouths with the corner of her apron. After this the Major took off his fur coat, eat his soup with great appetite, praised the excellent brandy which Mrs. Svallenius had distilled herself, thought the delicious cheese the best of its kind, and, in fact, behaved so well that before they had come to the roast veal, Mrs. Svallenius was perfectly satisfied that in all Christendom there could not be found a more pleasant, sensible, lively man than Major Sterner.

As soon as the dinner was over, and the coffee had been handed round, Sterner accompanied the minister into his own room.

"Well, my dear Alexander," said Svallenius, once more shaking hands with him, "we can now have an hour's chat together. Let me see—when was it that we last met? If my memory does not fail me, it was in the winter of 1829; you then went to Stockholm, and I came from Blekinge to Wallaryd to be installed. We were together a few days in W——; it is now seven years ago; since then I have remained in the same spot like the snail in its shell; you, on the contrary, have been roving about your native land and foreign countries. Your appearance has become more formed, more manly; it has much improved: and with sincere pleasure I see you, whom I always loved as a youth, now standing before me in the prime of life, with the same open frank expression which was peculiar to you formerly, and which faithfully reflects your inmost soul."

"May this expression which you recognize, my excellent friend, also tell you that my heart and character are the same as when I was under your fatherly guidance!"

"I am perfectly sure of that; but that was a vexatious affair you wrote me about from Stockholm, and which so soon ended the career you had begun with such great hope of success, and partly obliged you—but I see

* Without doubt the authoress of a cookery book.

this is a painful subject. Let us speak of what you have lately been about."

"With you, my friend, I can speak of all periods of my life, but if I appear sad at the recollection of the occurrence you mention, it is not because I am ashamed of my way of acting on that occasion; for as truly as I value my honor and conscience more than my life, I did not give the slightest cause for the events, in consequence of which I had to offer my resignation. I would willingly consign to oblivion the rude behavior of my former friend, for I am convinced to this hour, that my principles and mind were too well known to him, that he should seriously suspect me of the abominable act with which he, in a moment of passion and rashness, charged me publicly in society. I could not accept his challenge. You know my principles with regard to dueling; never will I embrace those false opinions which consider it an honor to despise and violate the rules of conscience as a proof of one's courage; never voluntarily shall my own nor another's blood be shed by me, except for my country, not even though I should be condemned by the tribunal of public opinion, whose lawless despotism carries the day. The slightest mention of this event leaves a disagreeable impression on my mind. It reminds me of the amiable young lady who was the innocent cause of my resignation. I afterward heard that her sufferings were at an end. This beautiful flower, whose purity could not be defiled by the poisonous atmosphere which her natural protector, with such levity, cast round her, is now transplanted to a brighter sphere."

Stern was much moved as he ended his simple explanation. A few minutes afterward he added,

"Often since that time I have received offers from my former commander-in-chief and patron, to enter the service again, either in the regiment I formerly belonged to, or in another; but as I have sent in my resignation, whether with or without grounds, no one shall say that Alexander Stern has, through the influence of others, or by persuasion, returned to that which he had himself renounced from his sense of right."

"Good, excellent, my dear friend; but tell me—how forgetful I am," he interrupted himself; "here we stand in the middle of the room, and do not reflect that to deliver one's argument with success, it must be while sitting with the pipe in the mouth, and the glass in the hand."

The pastor pushed chairs to the table, cleared away a heap of papers and books, then took out of the above-mentioned cupboard a bottle of old Rhenish wine, which in expectation of some peculiar occasion, he had hid there at the time of his eldest son's christening; further a pair of cut crystal glasses, a remembrance from the days when

he was a tutor, and, lastly, an unopened packet of most excellent fine tobacco, and two meerschaum pipes. After these preparations the gentlemen seated themselves at the table opposite each other, and after the pipes were duly filled and lighted, and the health of the guest, and his welcome back to his country, drunk in a bumper, Mr. Svalenius continued—

"But to return to our subject, my young friend: have you not embraced, by your way of acting, the old deep-rooted power of prejudice, and servilely submitted to her laws quite as much as he, who probably considers your honor stained by declining the challenge? Mark, I do not blame or dispute the justice of your last expressed opinion, concerning your returning to the service, for the word and action of a man should never be subjected to the slightest uncertainty; but why did you ask for your resignation? Your principles prohibited you from accepting the challenge, because duelling was only continued in consequence of obsolete opinions; but did your principles also bid you ask for your resignation in consequence of your refusing the challenge? Is not one quite as much the result of prejudice as the other? You have acknowledged the effects; but the motive and origin you have condemned, and therein lies some inconsistency. Therefore, if I am to pass my judgment on the justice or injustice of your resignation, I am of opinion that prejudice has had her secret influence in your resolution, as much as in that of others. To act from conviction is certainly right and good, but false views might corrupt conviction; then actions are no longer the independent property of the soul, but only a child of the imagination."

"Why did you not disregard the one prejudice as well as the other? Who forced you to resign, and who can prove that your honor would have been tarnished, if you had not done so yourself? Pardon me, Stern, but it appears to me that by this step you have almost shown as false a sense of honor as if you had accepted the challenge, and altogether you only half accomplished your manly resolution."

"But, contemplating it from another point of view, the erroneousness and rashness of your way of acting is seen. You had entered on a position of honor, for it is the occupation of that position to defend your country. You owed it your services, your efforts, your life; but still you robbed it of a hopeful member, forsooth, in consequence of a false opinion, a trifle, a whim, unworthy of a rational man. Had you a right to do it? Baron Von K—— had insulted you, not your country; why then make the latter suffer for the offense of the former? But that is not all. A man has duties toward himself. Does that man act rightly or wisely, who, having no private fortune, and not being able easily to find

another career suitable to his abilities, throws away his future promotion and subsistence, as a willful boy throws away his plaything? A rational man never acts without motives; but you had none. And if you wished by your resignation to cause Baron Von K—— injury or pain (which I know was not the case), you did not attain even this miserable satisfaction; for if I rightly understand human nature, one laughs at the cost of those who are so foolish as to do themselves an injury to punish others."

During this fatherly harangue of the minister, many frowns had been gathering between Sterner's eyebrows. As the former ended, he answered, evidently with suppressed anger in his voice:

"My old friend, it appears to me that you are too severe toward your former pupil. There is as much to be objected to in your conclusions as in your first arguments, but I might be permitted to draw your attention to one fact, that it is easy in one's solitary study, far removed from all human passions, to prove and judge how I should have thought and acted in this or that case in my life. If I picture to myself all the circumstances of a shipwreck, it is not difficult for me to judge which is the best way of saving myself; but were you mixed up in the vortex of society, could you guide your thoughts and actions with the same quiet reflection and cold calculation? If so, you would possess enviable wisdom. However, if my opinions and actions were wrong, which was possibly the case, my conviction at least is not of that kind which allows itself to be altered. What I thought right yesterday remains so to-day, to-morrow, and for the rest of my life. Therefore, if I did not possess a halfpenny, I would rather hire myself as a day-laborer, than enter my former service again, at least in time of peace."

"Well, my dear fellow, you must forgive your old tutor, if he has fallen into the usual weakness of declining age, namely, that of setting forth to youth the wisdom which he has gathered in his solitary chamber rather than by intercourse with the world, and personal experience; but pardon me, my young friend, I should remember that unasked advice is never acceptable. But I can not help laughing at your zeal. Only think what a figure for a day-laborer! I fancy I see your noble form bending over a block of wood with your ax in your hand, and afterward refreshing yourself in the kitchen with your oat-bread, sour milk, and broth. Ha, ha, ha! then your pride would be humbled."

"I do not think it likely that I shall ever be placed in such circumstances. There is, however, a proverb, which I do not despise: 'Let no one boast of his strength until it is put to the test.' I can not, therefore, tell you what would be my thoughts and feelings at a continual struggle to satisfy my daily wants."

"It is always pleasant to hear," said the pastor, "that a young man does not hold his opinions as unerring; that was, indeed, a reasonable answer, Alexander, a modest, humble answer, such as becomes a Christian."

"Heaven preserve me," replied Sterner, smiling, "from doing or thinking any thing but what becomes a Christian, and a sensible man. In order to retain my opinions, I sacrificed all that in a worldly point of view a man could, and therefore I had to go through much, that I, perhaps, otherwise should have escaped; but I have not yet had the misfortune to be obliged to become a courtier, and I trust I shall be spared this; for you see—"

Sterner drew his chair closer to Svallenius; but now the two gentlemen spoke so softly that Mrs. Svallenius, who during the whole of the above conversation was hid in the wardrobe (which stood between her husband's study and their bedroom) notwithstanding the most intense attention could only catch a few disjointed sentences.

"And with scarcely money left for my journey, out of the little capital, which the noble Linden had bequeathed to me—"

"Hem, hem! great good luck—extraordinary—the finger of God—continue."

What Sterner now said, Mrs. Svallenius could not possibly guess, for the words became almost whispered. Now she heard her husband say—

"Too high play, too high play, Alexander; it may miscarry."

"Aha!" said Mrs. Svallenius, "I thought in my soul that the young gentleman had another object in view in coming here to visit an old friend. He wishes to persuade the old man to play; but stay, I'll thwart his plan; I must have my finger in the pie; but I must wait and satisfy myself if the old man fetches the cards out of the press."

The pastor's wife was in the habit when she was alone of speaking her thoughts aloud. Now she forgot that she was in a situation which required silence. Sterner, who was very quick, overheard the sound of a voice close by. He got up, and approached the little door leading to the wardrobe, which had a small glass-window covered with a curtain. Mrs. Svallenius, who thought it was her husband going to the press to bring out the cards, was so much taken up listening to his movements, that she did not hear that steps approached the door behind which she had placed herself. Sterner stepped back in astonishment as he pushed aside the curtain, for he beheld a pair of eyes which shone like two glow-worms under a woman's cap, and the rest of the figure wrapped in a large wide black surplice. From beneath the dark folds, a red, bony hand was stretched forth, holding a thin yellow candle, whose feeble light revealed every thing round as in

confused ghostlike forms. Only the eyes stared fixedly at him. This glance reminded Sterner of the Eumenides; but the thought quickly struck him that it must be his amiable hostess. He therefore quietly drew back the curtain, and thought it best to appear as though he had seen nothing. The reader is aware that the spectre was actually our modest pastor's wife, who, to protect herself from the cold, had put on her husband's gown, and drawn it close up to her eyes; the minister, who sat with his back to the door, and had not observed in the slightest what was going forward, asked good-naturedly if he wanted any thing; but Sterner answered he was only looking at the arrangement of his room.

CHAPTER XIV.

Not wine alone, but flattery opens the heart.

In the evening, when the Major was alone with his servant, the former said—

"Well, Westerlind, are you comfortable here?"

"All right now, sir; but when I first came I can't say there was much comfort for me and the dogs. There was great work between the pastor and his wife."

"Hold your tongue, sirrah," said Sterner, harshly; "and mind your own business!"

"As you please, sir," said Westerlind, humbly, "I can be silent, even when I know that my master would thank me for speaking," added he, warmly; for Westerlind always remembered the proverb, "Be as wise as the serpent and as harmless as the dove."

"What are you saying? I see you have something on your heart; say on, but let it be in a few words."

"With your permission, it is not possible for me to make my report in a few words."

"Well, let it be as short as you possibly can, if I must needs hear it. But take care you do not undervalue the house in which I am a guest; for I tell you beforehand I will not permit it."

"I shall only speak the plain truth," began Westerlind, "which is, that when I arrived here the day before yesterday evening, the minister was obliged to conceal me in an outhouse, indeed in a hole, which here is called the needlework-room, until he had spoken to his wife, who verily is a piece of the—" a severe look from his master held Westerlind in check. "The minister, poor man," continued he, "had enough to do, for his wife flew into a furious passion, and wanted to send me and the dogs off by main force. In vain he employed every argument of reason to induce the damned—his wife, I mean—to receive us kindly, but it was as if he had poured water upon a goose's—no, upon Mrs. Svallenius, or, more prop-

erly speaking, he preached to deaf ears. At last he found the wheel to draw the cart—to bring Mrs. Svallenius to her senses. He said that it was not to be supposed that Major Sterner would cause so much trouble, if he did not intend to make the mistress of the house a handsome present. He had hit the right nail. She became quiet and docile as a lamb; for she changed her mood as quickly as one turns the page in a book. I was immediately sent for; got a nice little room to myself, and food in abundance—was, however, honored with an examination touching my master's circumstances, the object of his journey, &c. As I, however, have been so short a time in your service, and know your dislike to babbling, naturally I could not satisfy her curiosity. All the circumstances which I have just had the honor of relating, are nothing but the pure truth, and I thought it my duty to inform you, sir, for if Mrs. Svallenius's hopes are not soon realized, I am afraid the good-natured parson will have to pay for it when you are gone."

"It is good, Westerlind; I told you on entering my service, that I hated babbling, but on this occasion the object was right, almost praiseworthy. I shall take care that my hostess's good temper shall last, even after I have left. Now you may go."

The reason why Westerlind had shown such tender interest in the parson's welfare was as follows:

While Sterner and his host were closeted together in the study, and Mrs. Svallenius, in her hiding-place, did what she conceived necessary, Westerlind, who thought the society of his dogs in his little room rather monotonous, and had remarked that there were other ladies in the house besides Mrs. Svallenius, such too as would value him more highly, betook himself to the saloon, where the children played in their usual manner at the stove, while the chambermaid Anna, was engaged in drying plates, and folding up table-napkins. With that pleasing ease which becomes the smart servant of an elegant *garçon*, he began to help her, at the same time whispering all sorts of tender things to the pretty Anna, who rewarded his admiration with that artless friendship which one meets with in country girls of her station. Westerlind had not carried on the conversation long before he possessed little Anna's entire confidence.

She related to him many droll anecdotes of her master and mistress, in which the latter, however, always played the principal character. Among other things, she mentioned that all the girls of the parish, who wished to acquire the name of clever housekeepers, served in the parsonage a year before they married, when they went through a very efficient training in the well-regulated purgatory of Mrs. Svallenius.

"Heaven defend me," added Anna, "my

year has just begun! I shall have many a swelled cheek before it is at an end; for I must confess to you, Mr. Westerlind, if mistress is bent upon any thing, and it fails, so heaven preserve us poor maidens! we have always to bear her anger; and although we, on such occasions, pretend to have the toothache, so that we may tie up our heads with handkerchiefs, yet this does not protect us much from the unerring aim of her bony and well-practiced fist."

In immediate succession to this introduction, Anna told Mr. Westerlind that she had stood at the door, and heard the whole conversation between the parson and his wife, and how he had assured her that she would get a handsome present from the Major.

"Ah, Mr. Westerlind, if she is disappointed my mistress's fury will know no bounds."

Little Anna was just about to exhort Westerlind, with words and looks, to do his utmost to accomplish the prophecy, when the door of the bed-chamber was suddenly thrown open, and Mrs. Svallenius, pale as death, with her husband's black gown trailing after her, rushed wildly into the room; and in no less haste and with a terrible scream, Anna and the two children sprang into the kitchen, convinced that they had seen one of those fearful apparitions which were so often the subject of their evening colloquies. Westerlind remained behind to brave the storm.

"Stay, stupid idiots! where are you running to?" screamed the parson's wife, in a voice of thunder. "Have you all lost your senses! it is I!"

At this well-known voice, Anna and the children returned, trembling with fear.

"We were so dreadfully frightened, dear mamma," said the elder boy; "why have you dressed so oddly?"

Now, for the first time, Mrs. Svallenius remembered the curious dress she had on, and, to save the servant's and the children's respect for her, she answered: "Well, what is so curious about it? It is only your father's gown which I have brought to patch; I was rather frightened by a rat, and, therefore, in my haste, I threw it around me, that's all."

Anna, who had good grounds not to believe a word of this, and was not quite ignorant of the mysteries of the wardrobe, imparted to Westerlind, when they afterward met in the kitchen, that the gown, which had just been turned, could not possibly require mending so soon; and that her mistress, probably from a praiseworthy desire of knowledge, had wished to hear the gentlemen's conversation from her hiding-place; but she had now perceived that it would appear very silly if the gentlemen had discovered her design.

Westerlind, whose sympathy Anna's pretty face had won upon, laid the matter in due form before his master, but he was wise enough only to dwell upon the good clergy-

man's sorrow. Sterner weighed, in the goodness of his heart, his old friend's embarrassment, and his unfortunate domestic circumstances. He had already been made aware, by report, of how matters stood, and had determined to gain the good-will of his hostess, so that he might, as a friend of the family, try to improve her quarrelsome, nagging temper; but he saw, from her behavior the day before, to which Westerlind had given him the clew, that she could be as subtle and slippery as a snake when it was for her advantage. Nevertheless, Sterner determined to ingratiate himself into her favor, and, at the same time, to gain her esteem, in order to effect, with some success, a change in her.

Hereupon he began to reflect upon the marriage state in general, which subject kept him awake the whole night. But, without exactly giving the reader an account of Sterner's views on this subject, we can assure him that they did not in the least agree with those of our good Svallenius, when he had reflected upon the same important matter.

The next morning Sterner took from among the many things which his portmanteau contained, a beautiful, large, expensive shawl. "You were certainly destined," said he, "to cover a more elegant form than that of Mrs. Svallenius; but what is to be done? You must go, my friend; my worthy Svallenius' peace can not be too dearly bought, if it only lasts a short time. That will do; she will be strengthened in her persuasion that I believe the tale she told me yesterday evening at table, how she had been frightened while taking down her husband's gown to patch, by my appearing at the window."

The Major presented the packet which contained the costly gift to his hostess at breakfast-time.

"What in the world is this?" cried she, feigning surprise, most naturally. The parcel was opened, and the shawl unfolded; with mute delight she held it up. At a respectful distance of three steps behind the good dame stood the governess, two or three servant-maids peeped in through the half-open kitchen-door, all examining the treasure with astonished looks. At length Mrs. Svallenius said:

"My dear good Major, how can you embarrass me so? What have I done to deserve—"

"But," interrupted Svallenius, "he is only showing you the shawl, so why should you be embarrassed?"

Two rockets (for Mrs. Svallenius' glance can be compared to nothing else) were hurled at the poor man, who, for the moment, had forgotten the conversation he had previously had with his dear better-half; but Sterner hastened to interpose.

"What are you thinking of, my good

friend? It will afford me real pleasure," added Sterner, politely turning to Mrs. Svalenius, "if you will kindly accept this small present; let it be a slight proof of my esteem, and a remembrance of him, who will always consider it an honor to be counted among your friends."

She was easily appeased, and continued her thanks, which had been so disagreeably interrupted. "You astonish me quite, Major—you are much too good: such a valuable thing! I am quite confounded—" with pleasure, she might have said; for she pictured to herself, in her mind's eye, in bright colors, the envy which would be painted upon the neighbors' faces when they met on the next grand occasion; and Mrs. Svalenius, who possessed a lively imagination, enjoyed beforehand this delightful triumph.

Sterner could now count upon her favor for a long time,

He won much influence over her by his kind and quiet manners, and thus prevented, during the fortnight which he spent at the parsonage, many storms; so that the children, the servants, and even the minister himself, each in his own way, had, during these two weeks, a foretaste of the joys of paradise.

With real sorrow, and a painful impression of what they were about to lose, every one, Mrs. Svalenius not excepted, saw the day of his departure approaching. Soon after his arrival in Wallaryd, Sterner and the clergyman had made a short journey together, the object of which was to see and to buy the beautiful property Sorrbý: it was two miles distant from Wallaryd, but lay within the parish. The person who had the disposing of the property could not give a satisfactory answer to the proposed conditions for some time; to the joy of every body, Sterner was, therefore, to return in a few weeks, for he was very anxious to accomplish his cousin's wish to be in possession of Sorrbý by spring.

On taking leave, he said to Mrs. Svalenius, "In case, as I hope, this treaty be concluded, you must promise, dear Mrs. Svalenius, to assist with your great experience and skill: so that every thing may be properly arranged before the arrival of my cousin and his young wife, which I expect will be toward the end of next autumn. As my cousin Constantine's representative, I can assure you that such a kindness on your part will call forth his earnest thanks."

"Trust to me, dear Major. When the time comes, I shall manage to arrange every thing as if it were my own house." She then tied round his neck a red and green comforter. "This is a little remembrance; but pray use it. I knitted it for you myself with the greatest pleasure."

She now accompanied her dear guest a good way past the gate, and as she and her

husband returned from seeing him off, she declared her sincere opinion, that a wife for such a man as the Major, could not be found unless one searched the world from one end to the other, and that she did not regret one single minute of the thousands, that she and her whole house had wasted on his account.

The pastor smiled good-humoredly, and taking his wax-light and book in his hand, said, "God grant that this day's peace may become my daily bread."

The same evening, when all six spinning wheels were busily at work round the stove, and the boys in their grey coats now and then revived the flames by throwing in little bundles of brushwood, Mrs. Svalenius condescended to inform those around her, what she secretly wished spread abroad, namely, the confidence the agreeable Major had honored her with.

CHAPTER XV.

A SURPRISE.

Where my heart lies, how wildly throbs the spot!
And yet a willing victim am I not?
Longing and pining for—I know not what!

TERNER.

DURING the time that Sterner was away, which had been lengthened by a hasty journey to West-Gothland, the Von Spalden family had removed to a pretty and agreeable dwelling, which accorded better with their now brilliant prospects. Nobody but Augusta regretted the old house, for she had enjoyed a few, but never-to-be-forgotten hours of unexpected happiness, in her little boudoir so opportunely situated facing the goldsmith's court-yard.

She sighed involuntarily, as her thoughts dwelt upon that picture, which had conjured up, as if by magic, in her once tranquil heart, this chaos of emotions; the portrait of him, whom fate seemed to have destined for her husband, appeared in the highest degree distasteful to her, and if she ever took it out, it was only to compare his features with those which were indelibly impressed on her thoughts. After each of such examinations, she was always more unjust toward the innocent original of the picture, whose lively and really handsome features watched her, and her grief, as she thought, with a triumphant smile. What, however, weighed down poor Augusta's heart the most was, that she could not possibly think of a way to escape from her father's decided commands, because either from the result of a servile and slavish education, or from a naturally soft, yielding character, she had never dared to assert her own independence and that power, which her pride whispered to her she ought to possess and to show.

The poor girl still trembled when she

thought of her father's anger, as she, on her former engagement with Blandin, implored him for mercy; when she remembered how harsh he had then been, and that this time she had even less to expect from his generosity, because he had not exercised his authority when there was some talk of a match between her and postmaster Wilson. And Augusta could not deny that so far as her own inclinations were not concerned, the alliance now proposed was, according to the judgment of the parents at least, a very desirable one.

The post-inspector, a few days after they moved into their new house, said to her, in that tone, which, from her youth up, had made Augusta tremble more than any other misfortune—"Do not dare to refuse to give a thankful and decided *yes*, when the Major returns; don't make any demur: you are like a child that does not understand what is for its own good!"

"Oh, dear papa! let it remain undecided until Mr. Constantine Sterner comes himself," said Augusta weeping, and trying to take his hand.

"Foolish child!" shouted the post-inspector, and pushed her roughly from him; "is this the love and obedience, which I have a right to expect from you? but do not hope to make me yield. As soon as the Major arrives, you shall give your consent, and present him with your own hands your portrait, which shall be immediately painted!"

Augusta did not venture to reply. It was only with her still tender mother that she permitted herself to weep; but even to her mother she did not confide the true cause of her sorrow. She did not know why; but she could not bring herself to speak of her feelings even to her.

One evening in the middle of March, the drawing-rooms and dining-room of the post-inspector's house were brilliantly lighted up. The open card-tables indicating that others, besides the usual inhabitants of the house, were expected. The post-inspector had invited a number of old friends, whose acquaintance he had now resumed, to celebrate his coming into some fortune.

Augusta, wishing to avoid the irksome congratulations with which she made sure she would be assailed, left the room as soon as the guests had all arrived, and escaped to her own little sitting-room, which was situated at the other end of the passage that separated the room she had just left from hers. She placed herself at her dear piano, and softly, so that no one should hear her, she began that song, which was once accompanied by those soul-inspiring tones, which echoed so sadly and so often in her heart; but at the first words which rose to her lips, the first chord she struck, she burst into tears, and bent sobbing over the side of her piano. She felt so unhappy, so lonely and

deserted! Thus passed some minutes, when a voice, which she too well knew, whispered close to her—

"Why so sad, dear Augusta?"

"Ah! is it you, Major Sterner?" cried she, starting up in the utmost surprise, while she tried to dry her tears. "Pardon me; but I am not cheerful this evening."

"That I see with sorrow," said Sterner, taking her hand; may I be so bold as to ask what annoys you?"

"Major Sterner," replied Augusta, recovering herself, "I will not keep from you the cause, for I believe I ought not; and as chance has brought us together, before you, as I suppose, have spoken to my father, I shall take advantage of the opportunity to tell you, with all due respect to your cousin, that I feel myself indescribably unhappy and depressed by my father's orders, for he expects me on your return, to declare myself content with my deceased uncle's wishes, and in corroboration of my words, to give you, as his representative, my portrait. But I can not make such an assertion to you without departing from the truth."

Sterner changed color at this artless candor, but said, with tolerable composure—

"As you seem to entertain so great a dislike to the marriage in view, I will not expect a decided answer. Perhaps my cousin will plead his own cause better; in case," added he, looking at her fixedly, "Miss Von Spalden's heart was not given away before my mission began."

Notwithstanding he took the utmost pains to remain composed, the tone of his voice, during these last words, "before my mission began," showed such intense suspense, such great emotion, that it could not have escaped the notice of the most indifferent observer, much less the eye of a woman, that the answer to this question or conjecture (it could be regarded as both) was of quite as much interest to himself as to his friend. Augusta felt a light dawn across her mind, as bright as the first rosy streak of day amidst the surrounding gloom: confusedly she answered.

"That is not the case."

"Not?" said he, as his face brightened. "Then I do not see any reason why you should not at least become acquainted with him who is destined to be your husband. He has placed his happiness in my hands; it is therefore my duty to speak for him with warmth. A refusal to see and become acquainted with him, would not exhibit my endeavors for him in the most brilliant light. All that I demand is, that you will allow him personally to plead for himself; I trust you will not deny him this."

"Your arguments may be right, Major Sterner," answered Augusta; "but I must confess to you, that if your cousin comes he may possibly get possession of my hand; for my peace and my happiness, my tears and

my prayers, could never induce my father to depart from his fixed determination and plans; but no one can command my heart, and it will for ever remain cold for your cousin."

"Miss Von Spalden," interposed Sterner, "may rest assured that my cousin is much too noble-minded to receive his wife as a sacrifice. He is a man of perfect honor, and in this case there can be no talk of compulsion."

"It is well for him that it is so," said Augusta; "but it will help me but little if he once comes here, for my father too well understands to arrange matters so, that in your cousin's eyes all will have the appearance of voluntary acquiescence on my part. You may call it an unheard-of weakness, or what you please, but I feel that I can not openly oppose his will. It is my lot to die of sorrow, or console myself as best I may, before it strikes a single sympathizing being, that poor Augusta may be unhappy in golden chains."

"Do not speak thus, dear Augusta," said Sterner, in a voice which testified the feelings which lately had so powerfully influenced his soul. "In my breast be assured, Augusta, there beats a heart in the highest degree sensible to your joys and sorrows; but will my sympathy have any weight with you? May I dare to hope so?"

"Experience has taught me, that I can not depend on your sympathy; for all I have been saying till now was to prevail upon you to advise your cousin against his journey hither; but you seem only bent on hastening it; I can therefore hope little from you."

"Dear Augusta, if you knew him you have just judged so harshly, you would think better of him. It is sufficient for you to know that you may expect as much from my sympathy as lies in my power. My duty forbids me to comply with your desire in respect to my cousin's journey here. This must be; but I swear to you solemnly, that when you have proved and judged his worth yourself, if you then still retain your present feelings, no power on earth shall force you to be his wife."

"If this be the case, I will willingly admit that I have mistaken you; but, believe me, my father will carry through what he has once taken into his head."

"I do not doubt that he will try; but if—," Sterner was silent; he seemed to struggle with himself; but after a while he caught her hand, and said, "If in the heart of a woman, that sanctuary whither no strange eye should penetrate, a silent, holy flame burns, of whose existence she alone is aware, should she not be strong enough to shelter it, if even with a struggle, from rough, threatening storms?"

A bright blush spread itself over Augusta's face. However, she answered with self-command and dignity—

"According to the principles in which I

have been educated, it is only a man who can resist power; submission and obedience belong to the wife and daughter; nothing but entreaties can be used by them. The storm may thus destroy the sanctuary where the flame burns, but under its fallen ruins the ashes continue to burn, and are only extinguished with life."

With much emotion Sterner bent down to Augusta and whispered: "Pardon my boldness. I ventured to try and penetrate Augusta's heart. Happy the man who can call it his own; but if you will permit me to express my opinion," added he, after a pause, "it is not one of the duties of a good daughter to allow herself to be led blindly, or against her own judgment, by the will of another, even though that other be her father. Of course, a young and inexperienced girl ought to consult her parents upon the worth of him who proposes for her hand; if, however, she does not care for him, no law, human or divine, commands that she should bring about her own unhappiness and that of another, by an obedience, which ceases to be natural, because it is no longer the result of sincere filial love, but rather a proof of slavish subjection, which is unworthy of a free, rational being."

Each of the Major's words penetrated to Augusta's heart, and vibrated long after he had finished speaking. These words had awoken in her a crowd of new and strange thoughts and feelings. She did not answer; but she soon felt that this silence was too pointed, and thought it was time to break it. She felt reassured and happy from this conversation with Sterner; still she could not quite make out what he meant; but that his intentions were good, Augusta had not the slightest doubt. She now rose quickly and said—"You missed your way to the drawing-room, Major Sterner, when you opened this door instead of the one opposite. We have a small party this evening; permit me to show you the way to the room, where the guests are doubtless already with my parents."

"I just remember," said the Major, "why I came here; although I heard several voices in the room opposite, I heard some soft, well-known sounds in this room, the beginning of a song, which touches my heart more than any other. I listened like the Alpine shepherd, who after long absence hears his native melodies again, and I could not resist the temptation to enter. I hope you will forgive my boldness; how happy, how thankful I should be to you, if you would kindly allow me to hear again the sweet tones, which, during my former stay in L—, afforded me some such delightful moments."

"Ah, Major Sterner," said Augusta, blushing deeply at the remembrance of those, to her, important musical entertainments, "do not speak of it! I can not comply with your

wish at present, although I frankly confess, that I was glad when you accompanied me; it supported my voice. We can not have the pleasure of practicing this evening, for our guests would soon find their way here; and, for my part, I know nothing more disagreeable, than when the sensations which the power of music has inspired, are cooled by a buzzing around one, or by insipid praises. But what do you say?"

"Amen, I say, with all my heart, dear Augusta; particularly if you will promise to comply with my wish another time. I rejoice that in this respect you are quite of my way of thinking; but I forgot that a duet would give your parents, as well as the guests, cause to fancy that we wished to increase the brilliancy of the entertainment, by a little surprise, while I have not yet had an opportunity of paying my respects to the former, or my compliments to the latter."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE EFFECTS OF NEW OPINIONS.—THE POST-INSPECTOR'S DETERMINATIONS.

In the far north Love dwells below
The chilly glaciers, sea and snow—
Its hidden fires, nor burn, nor blaze
As 'neath the southern sun's fierce rays,
But yet they gently warm the heart.

DER SOHN im Adlerswald.

THEY now entered the drawing-room, where the post-inspector received his new guest with a face beaming with joy.

The introductions and compliments which were exchanged between the new-comer and those already present, occupied a good part of the evening, till Sterner at last took his place at a card-table, along with the Burgomaster and Doctor.

When Sterner was taking his leave, the post-inspector said to him, "If it be convenient to you, Major, we can arrange matters to-morrow morning."

Sterner bowed assent, and was, according to agreement, in the post-inspector's drawing-room by eleven o'clock the following day.

He found him alone. After the gentlemen had conversed about the changeableness of the weather, the scarcity of wood, which happened in consequence of the state of the sledge-roads, and the ice, and various other subjects, there was a silence, which was at length broken by Sterner.

"You are aware, Mr. Von Spalden," said he, "that I have promised my cousin to let him know how things stand; may I, therefore, beg an answer from you and your daughter, in respect to his journey here, as well as about the desired portrait?"

"I shall," said the post-inspector, "myself write the heir in the name of my daughter, that he is welcome, and, indeed, as much as it becomes a modest girl, will be expected

with impatience. But, as you are authorized by the absent, you shall hear it from her own mouth, so that by your testimony you can give the matter due weight."

With these words the post-inspector went to the door, and cried "Augusta!" in a voice fit to wake the dead.

She immediately entered, and bowed to the Major with some embarrassment, which, slight as it was, did not escape her father; he said to her, in such a cutting tone that Sterner was amazed at its harsh severity,

"Augusta, you are to confirm what your father has already stated, that in the joyful persuasion that your deceased uncle's wishes will prove your happiness, with your own free will, you consent to unite your destiny to the man whom he has chosen for you."

Augusta did not dare to look up; but treasuring Sterner's words in her heart, she endeavored for the first time in her life to overcome her fear of her severe father, and answered meekly, yet tolerably quietly,

"Neither Mr. Sterner himself nor his substitute can with reason expect that I should make such a confession, before I have seen and become acquainted with him to whom I owe such an important answer. He is quite welcome to come here. If he can win my heart, I will certainly become his wife; but should this not be the case, I hope that a man of honor will not accept such a sacrifice."

Sterner cast a glance at the speaker which expressed the warmest admiration.

The father sat for some minutes as if petrified by surprise and horror, at the unheard-of boldness of his daughter. At last he rose hastily, but checked himself as he remembered Sterner's presence, and said, in a voice half-choked with rage,

"Is that my child who speaks thus? Are you in a fever? Speak, what is the matter with you, girl? I can hardly believe my senses! In my presence, and against the will of me, your father, do you dare to say all this? Tell me, do you not remember the fourth commandment?"

"Oh, calm yourself, calm yourself, my dear, beloved father!" sobbed the maiden, trying to take his hand, but was flung back with savage violence. "I have never forgotten the obedience which I owe you, and which you have a right to expect from me, and never shall I forget it; but be merciful! I am your child; you can not wish to annihilate all peace and hope of happiness in the being who owes her existence to you. My heart has claims to the joys of life, why should you then condemn it to its sorrows, because you have the power to do so? One does not crush intentionally an insect, because it can not defend itself against the foot, which with one stamp can annihilate its existence! I have not opposed your will; I only request to see, and become acquainted

with him, who is destined to be my husband. It may even be possible that you yourself may change your mind when you have become acquainted with him."

Augusta's form at the moment when, with the greatest emotion, and, at the same time, the mildest submission in her manner, she bent over the hand of her enraged father, appeared inexpressibly touching to Sterner; but to this feeling was united a sort of painful indignation, that he must see her in this, as it seemed to him, humiliating position, and with difficulty he suppressed the anger which the cold, relentless demeanor of the post-inspector awoke in him, as, without the slightest regard for his daughter's grief, he pushed her from him with chilling indifference.

"Mr. Von Spalden," said Sterner, "what your daughter has just said is too reasonable, for me, at least, to make any objection to. I answer for it, that my cousin will think the conditions she has dictated perfectly just. They are those of reason and good feeling, and in his name I accept them. There only remains for me to ask, if the young lady will allow me to take her portrait with me."

"If she will allow it!" cried the post-inspector, disdainfully; "I fancy I have still a word to say in the matter. Bring the portrait here, Augusta."

She hesitated, but did not dare to irritate her father by further opposition.

"Major Sterner," said she, in a trembling voice, as she handed him the miniature, "remember that I send this to your cousin by my father's command, and you must tell him so."

"Do you dare," said the post-inspector, with suppressed anger, "to dictate to Major Sterner what he is to communicate to his cousin?" He then turned to Sterner, and continued—"I hope, Major, you will not pay attention to my daughter's childishness, nor acquaint your cousin with it. Believe me, Major, I know women, and can assure you that these sentimental whims will disappear like chaff before the wind, when the wedding is once over. I speak from experience."

"I shall try to do my duty in every respect," answered the Major, seriously, and hastily took his leave, pleading urgent business.

As soon as the post-inspector thought that Sterner was at a respectful distance from the steps, so that he could not overhear any thing, his now unrestrained passion broke out. What, however, increased, if possible, his rage, was, that his daughter neither wept, begged his pardon, nor spoke as she usually did, of willingly sacrificing her own wishes to satisfy her father. All this, which, although it did not alter his selfish determination, tended to appease his violence, and gave him, at least, a sort of excuse for stopping his rage, was this time wanting. She was silent, and received all his reproaches patiently; but no

word of repentance was heard, and she shed no tears.

For the first time in her life Augusta dared to feel wounded and annoyed at her father's conduct. Although not very sharp, yet Mr. Von Spalden, after putting one thing with another, could draw his own conclusions. He thought it was impossible that Augusta could possess the impudence to cherish another wish, or to have another will, than his; and what was worse than all, that she should dare openly to express her opinion. It was not likely that she should gain sufficient resolution to break the habit of many years' standing, or should think for a minute, without being influenced by another, of setting herself up in opposition to her father's authority; and whose influence could it be, but that of the ambassador himself, who perhaps wished to win her whom he pretended to seek for his cousin? As soon as this idea had become developed in the post-inspector's mind, he betook himself, without saying a word to Augusta, to his wife, who always served as a scape-goat for his ill-humor.

He locked the door like a man who has an important secret to disclose, seated himself opposite his wife, who expected nothing good from these solemn preparations, and began in a voice which, as he thought, was becoming a gentleman and a father, who wishes to prevent a very great misfortune.

"Woman, how have you brought up your daughter? I tell you, Augusta is not as she should be."

Mrs. Von Spalden, who, by his words and ill-omened face, thought some great misfortune had happened, could scarcely breathe.

"Heavens!" she stammered at last, "what do you say, William? No, no, it is quite impossible; it is a mere freak of your imagination."

"What!" screamed the post-inspector, "are you bewitched too! Have I ever lived to hear you, my wife, make such a speech! A freak of my imagination! Rigitza, I am a good husband and father; but obedience I will have, and Heaven defend you, if I find you intriguing with the girl."

"But, my dear, of what are you really speaking? What is not with Augusta as it should be? You frighten me to death; tell me the truth at once."

"What it is, you, as her mother, ought to know better than I. That Sterner, there, is a handsome, elegant fellow, and I tell you he is fishing after the girl on his own account; and goodness knows what intrigues he will be up to, to destroy the will. In short, I completely see through his plans; and that the girl lends a willing ear to his cursed nonsense about love, is as clear as day. He dare not, on account of his honor, take a bold step, and much less can I forbid him the house. As, therefore, the evil can not be quite de-

stroyed before the arrival of the heir, it is our duty at least to prevent its growth. I therefore order you never in my absence to leave Augusta alone with the Major, for we must try to prevent any opportunity for sympathy between them. Have you understood my wishes, Rigitza?"

"Not quite, William; you spoke of the poor girl in such doubtful words. So it is nothing more nor less than that dear, noble Sterner has taken a liking to the sweet child; is it really nothing else?"

"Nothing else, not a jot more! Do you think that nothing? Pray what misfortune could be greater?" screamed the post-inspector. "Have you not tasted enough of the bitterness of poverty to wish your only child to plunge herself into adversity? And the shortest way to this would be a marriage with the Major, who does not possess a half-penny but what the heir gives him out of compassion and charity. This would certainly be a wise thing for prudent parents to do. I have now told you my thoughts, motives, and reasons, and expect that you act upon them without further objections."

Having thus disburdened himself, he left his wife, who, as the door slammed after her exasperated husband, sunk weeping into a chair.

"Augusta, my dearest child," sighed she, "must you go through the same bitter trials as your mother! But perhaps," she tried to console herself, "her father has mistaken her sentiments toward the Major. This is my only hope."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BASKET OF EELS.

DAYS and weeks flew on. Sterner had made the above-mentioned journey to Wallaryd, and had concluded the purchase of the beautiful Sorrbý. Here went on a busy scene, with repairs and improvements of every kind. The most tasteful and modern furniture was ordered from Copenhagen. Joiners, painters, glaziers, and bricklayers were all employed at Sorrbý; the busiest of the busy, however, was Mrs. Svalenius. She went thither, sometimes accompanied by the Major, sometimes alone; considered and examined, approved of and rejected, and hastened the progress of the work with the greatest possible zeal. The whole arrangement of the kitchen was entrusted to her care, the superintending the garden, particularly as regarded the planting of cabbages, peas, asparagus, and many other things requisite in a well-kept kitchen: added to this, seeing after servants, bedding, linen, table-cloths, &c. One can imagine how busy Mrs. Svalenius made herself, and how high Sterner stood in her favor, that she should willingly

take all this care and trouble upon herself; but the Major understood the art of gaining her good graces, and retaining them. Nobody could feign a more contented look than Sterner, when Mrs. Svalenius assured him that no linen could be more excellent than what was made in her own dear manufactory. He expressed his astonishment that such a web could be got at so low a price.

In the spinning-room at Wallaryd now rattled four looms, instead of spinning-wheels. Sterner walked by Mrs. Svalenius's side, looked at, and examined every thing; wondered at her extraordinary quickness in being able to count up and apply the artistical flowers and crowns from the pattern-book; he encouraged the servant-maids with money, the governess, Gustavin Bjork, by little appropriate presents, and patted the mistress of the house beseechingly on the shoulder when she sometimes thought it necessary to have recourse to her old method to hasten the work.

While all this was going on, the minister smoked his pipe in peace, read his old theological works, and daily thanked the Lord and his young friend, for this blessed state of things.

Mrs. Svalenius either thought that her husband was too insignificant an object to claim her attention, while she had such important occupations on hand, or these very employments themselves had nearly weaned her of her old habit of quarreling, and contradicting him in every thing: anyhow, she behaved, as long as Sterner staid in the house, like any other active matron.

The Major had returned again to L——, but his visits to the house of the post-inspector had become more ceremonious. Mr. Von Spalden always received him with measured courtesy, and seemed to have imposed upon himself, as a polite host, the task of keeping his guest uninterrupted company. The hundred eyes of Argus were not more sure than the two of the post-inspector.

Sterner, who fully observed the post-inspector's uneasiness, and guessed its cause, never approached Augusta, except when some accidental opportunity offered itself; but, nevertheless, he continued his visits every day.

One afternoon, when Sterner was as usual with the Von Spalden family, the post-inspector was called away to the Burgomaster's on some matter of importance. He gave his wife a significant wink to take his place, and departed with dark forebodings.

Some minutes had elapsed since the post-inspector's departure, but all remained so hushed in the room, that there was no other sound but Augusta's needle (whose swiftness had considerably increased since her father's departure), and Mrs. Von Spalden's knitting-needles. Sterner, evidently out of humor, was looking over a newspaper. The

poor hostess, who felt that in the present critical state of affairs she was not capable of introducing a suitable subject for conversation, at length proposed to Augusta to play something for the Major.

"A capital proposition, my dear Mrs. Von Spalden. Let us begin at once," said Sterner, as he threw the paper from him. He opened the piano, set a stool before it, and approached Augusta; she hesitated, blushed slightly, and bent down her eyes. But the mamma, who did not suspect the magic power music had over her, blamed Augusta for her delay, and said—

"Do not be so bashful, my dear, I am certain the Major has heard worse as well as better music than yours."

Augusta rose, turned over the leaves of her music-book, and at last began one of Beethoven's Sonatas, but Mrs. Von Spalden thought she was not playing as well as usual, and was just about to tell Augusta so, when she accidentally glanced on the street, where she beheld a fisherman carrying a basket-full of unusually large fine eels. Mrs. Von Spalden, who was an attentive housewife, and remembered that eels was a favorite dish of her husband, forgot for the moment her position as guardian, ran out, called the lad, bought the eels, and very systematically explained to a servant girl, who had just entered her service, the different ways this kind of fish could be dressed.

"If you have too many irons in the fire, some of them will burn," says the proverb; and so it happened to Mrs. Von Spalden, like many other people, who undertake too many things at once.

Augusta had begun some difficult variations of Kalkbrenner, Sterner had bent over the back of the chair to turn the pages quicker, when a little medallion, which he wore on a chain round his neck, fell from its hiding place, and would have touched the keys, if Augusta had not caught it while falling. She had it in her hand, and jokingly said, while she held it up to the Major by the chain—

"Now I have got you prisoner, Major! But you shall receive your liberty if I may see the medallion."

Sterner answered, evidently much embarrassed: "I doubt if Miss Augusta would have to fear an attempt at escape from him whom she had once determined to captivate, even were his captivity for a long time; but is it possible that even Augusta Von Spalden can be infected with a certain little fault, which one is accustomed to attribute to her sex in general?"

"No, Major Sterner, do not suspect me of curiosity, and pardon me if I have thoughtlessly turned this accident into a joke. I hope you will consider it as such, although I do not often jest."

With these words, which Augusta said in

an unusually constrained voice, she gave back the medallion with an averted face. A dim, painful feeling roused the thought in her, that the locket contained something which Sterner wished to conceal from her; but instinct told her, that this feeling must remain unknown to him; thus, while she exerted herself to assume an indifferent accent, she became unnatural. Some people maintain that a certain degree of coquetry and dissimulation is innate in women, and that these develop themselves according to their mental abilities, and the situation in which women are placed during the vicissitudes of life. Let this be as it may, Augusta at least was as yet inexperienced in the art; and if its seeds lay in her young, innocent heart, they had not yet sprung up.

The worldly-wise Sterner saw the emotion which she sought to hide, and discerning its cause with secret delight, he said with quiet earnestness, "I could have wished that this accident had not happened; but now, let the consequences be what they may, you must see what this locket contains, and quiet yourself about it, that is to say, if my bold conjecture has any foundation, that it has caused you a moment's uneasiness; for I am convinced that you are too sensible to be mortified by unsatisfied curiosity."

"No, no, Major Sterner," answered she, holding her hands before her face, more to hide the blushes she felt deepening her cheeks, than to avoid looking at the medallion; "I will not see what it contains; it was only a joke, I assure you; it was only a joke, and nothing else."

"There are certain things which are too delicate to be made a subject for joking," said Sterner. "Dear Augusta, I pray you, look up; the minutes are precious!"

He held the medallion close to her eyes.

Could Augusta possibly withstand, when Sterner so earnestly besought her? She looked up; an involuntary exclamation escaped her lips, for she recognized her own portrait, which she thought safely deposited in Hamburg!

"Augusta," said Sterner, "I fear this will inspire you with no very exalted idea of my honesty; but you may rest assured, I have never committed an act for which I have had to blush. Tell me if you believe and pardon me, although appearances are against me."

"I willingly believe you, and have nothing to forgive," answered Augusta, eagerly endeavoring with the tip of her little finger to polish one of the keys of the piano-forte whiter than it was already.

"Then I may wear it with your permission?" asked Sterner.

She did not answer.

"Augusta," continued Sterner, fervently, "consider what hopes this silence excites!"

"I think," said she, quickly, "that if Major Sterner had not felt himself satisfied, that I would rather see the portrait in his hands than in those of his cousin, he would never have been guilty of an act, which is, perhaps, not quite upright toward his friend."

Augusta said this very seriously, as she raised to Sterner her beautiful eyes, on whose long lashes trembled a tell-tale tear.

There was something so purely innocent, something so charming in this simple, artless confession, that Sterner was quite captivated by it. He had almost flung himself at her feet, but he constrained himself, and said, with tolerable self-command,

"Oh, Augusta!—dear Augusta! this hour can never be forgotten by me! I can justify all my actions to you and my conscience, only let me beseech you never to distrust them, even though they appear to you incomprehensible and doubtful. Let me have this assurance from your own lips."

With these words Sterner bent familiarly toward Augusta, and took her hand; but at that same moment the post-inspector entered the room. His anger and astonishment at not finding his wife there, and the young people alone, and in this position, was beyond all description. Sterner, who in general did not easily lose his self-command, was now in the utmost embarrassment; in his confusion he asked the post-inspector, if he had amused himself well at the Burgomaster's?

"What do you mean, sir? Do you think that he and I only run after amusement, like certain people?" cried the post-inspector.

"As I see that Mr. Von Spalden is in a bad humor, I will not trouble him this evening. I trust to find you more composed to-morrow."

Hereupon Sterner took his hat, made a bow, and went. Augusta had seized the opportunity to escape during this polite conversation between her father and Sterner.

When the post-inspector found himself alone, he first threw his hat with all his might at his wife's favorite cat, which lay inoffensively on the sofa, cleaning its face with its paw; then he went to seek out the unhappy one, whom he had appointed guardian of the gates of Paradise.

He met his wife in the drawing-room, whither she had just quietly returned, after having finished her lecture on eels. As soon as she beheld her husband, she exclaimed, coming toward him with the happiest face in the world,

"Well, William, only think, I have bought seven pounds of eels, to—"

"I wish you and your eels were—" With these words commenced the thunder-storm which was to break over his wife, but it was interrupted in so unusual and extraordinary a way, that it requires a new chapter to relate this interlude.

CHAPTER XVIII.

I never had such a surprise!
I must to the Burgomaster.

A LITTLE while before the Major left Mr. Von Spalden's house (it was in the beginning of May, at about six o'clock in the evening), Traiteur Tejfer stood at his window comfortably smoking his pipe, when a smart-looking carriage rolled into the courtyard, in which sat a young, fair-haired gentleman.

Like an obliging landlord he went to receive the stranger, who called to him.

"Does Major Sterner live here?"

"No," answered Traiteur. "If he is still in the town, he is to be found at Goldsmith Hjertberg's."

"So; is he then really in L——?"

"Yes, that you may be sure he is; for I saw him early this morning."

"Will you have the goodness then to let somebody go with me, to show me his quarters?"

"Kalle," called Traiteur to his eldest son; "show the gentleman the way to Hjertberg's; but in passing, I must acquaint you," said he to the stranger, "that there is not another room to be had at the goldsmith's, but the one the Major now occupies. If you wish it, sir, we will get one ready for you here."

"On no account; I do not intend to remain the night here."

"In this case," added Traiteur, who was intent upon gathering news for his evening guests, "it will be as well if Kalle brings down with him the visitors' book."

"My time is precious," said the traveler, impatiently. "Perhaps you will have the goodness to write my name in it yourself, mine host—Lieutenant Constantine Sterner, from Hamburg, is going to F——."

"It shall be done," answered Tejfer. And the traveler now received permission to betake himself whither he would.

Arrived at the goldsmith's house, with two sentences he made his way into the shop.

"Is the Major at home?—where is his room?" he asked in one breath of the shop-boy who came toward him.

"He is at the post-inspector, Von Spalden's."

"Ah, how abominable!" murmured the stranger, enraged. "Then send somebody for him!"

An apprentice was dispatched, but returned with the answer that the Major had just left the house.

"Cursed, extraordinary bad luck!" broke forth from the Lieutenant, as, pressing his forehead, he jumped into the carriage again, and ordered that he should be driven to the Von Spaldens' house.

Arrived there, our impatient young traveler sprang up the steps, and came by mistake into the kitchen, where a maid was

striving with all her might to pull off the skin of one of the unhappy eels, which she had hung on a nail. She was so absorbed in her occupation, that she did not hear the question put to her, if the post-inspector was at home; therefore, the stranger, thinking she was deaf, drew near, and was just about to repeat the question in a louder voice, when the faithless eel's skin glided out of the girl's hand. She fell backward to the ground, and would possibly have brought the Lieutenant down with her, if he had not quickly retreated to one side. He helped the girl up, not very tenderly it must be owned; she stared at her visitor with looks of astonishment, while she rubbed with her hand the part she had hurt the most.

"Ask if a stranger may speak a few words to the post-inspector!" screamed the Lieutenant in her ear.

"Zounds!" said she, sneering. "Does the gentleman think I can't hear well? If he will follow me, I will take him to the post-inspector."

They went up-stairs together, and the stranger remained in the ante-chamber, until the servant girl stepped into the drawing-room to announce him. The Lieutenant heard with astonishment an indistinct, wild noise in the drawing-room, and immediately afterward the door was violently flung open by Mr. Von Spalden himself. When he saw before him the original of the portrait of the unknown suitor, he exclaimed in the most delightful surprise—

"Now, the Lord be praised, it is Mr. Sterner himself!"

"Quite right," replied the stranger, smiling. "How comes it that I have the pleasure of being already known to you?"

"Well, what a question! you must give me credit for very little penetration, if you think I could be for a moment deceived in your face. The nose, the mouth, the eyes, all is right."

"Yes, that they certainly are," said the Lieutenant, who could hardly refrain from bursting into a fit of laughter; "but I can not understand—"

"Where the ladies are," interrupted the post-inspector. "Ay, only wait a moment! Be so good as to take a seat in the mean time; my family will be here immediately."

"I am much indebted to you for your politeness," answered the Lieutenant; "but to tell you the truth I am in great haste. My business was—"

"Well, yes," smiled the post-inspector. "I can well understand that you are in haste; but still you must have patience for a few minutes. She will be here directly!"

"But as I wished to find my cousin, Major Sterner, I took the liberty—"

"Quite right, quite right! you will meet him by and by, but I may say to you in confidence, that I fear you have set a fox to keep

the geese: by my life, it is a mercy you have come!"

"How so?" asked the Lieutenant, perplexed. "What can you possibly mean? I can not really guess—"

"That your betrothed can please him, as well as you. Yes, yes, my young friend, this is nothing new in the world."

"Alexander, my cousin, the best and most upright man I know, that he should be capable of taking advantage of my absence, to win my betrothed to himself! No, with your permission it is an impossibility. Mr. Von Spalden can not know the man whom he thus accuses."

"Well, well, if he did not exactly intend to cut you out—for, indeed, he is bound by his word of honor—at all events he had, as is usually said, an eye upon the maiden, and that is not entirely to be wondered at; for without boasting, she is more than commonly beautiful, and if I might be allowed to say it, she is very like me—*nota bene*, what I was in my youth."

"No, this is too ridiculous," cried the Lieutenant, laughing with all his heart. "My intended like you! Pardon me, Mr. Von Spalden, but a decided alteration must have taken place in her since I last saw her."

"I thank you humbly for the compliment, my young gentleman," said the post-inspector, annoyed; "but to judge of a thing one should have seen it. You do not know your intended in the least, and have never seen her."

"Pardon me, Mr. Von Spalden, if I remind you that I did not come here to play a comedy with you," said the Lieutenant, now in his turn provoked. "How should I be engaged, if I did not know, and had never seen my *fiancée*?"

"Well, don't be so fiery, my friend! It is possible you may have seen her in your earliest youth. But I will go and fetch her to put an end to this talking."

"My *fiancée*!" exclaimed the Lieutenant, greatly surprised: "is *she* here?"

"Ay, where else should she be?" interrupted the post-inspector, going toward Augusta's room, and without telling her of the arrival of the all-important guest, kindly begged her to follow him into the ante-chamber. Lieutenant Sterner and the perfectly perplexed girl stood a few minutes in silence, face to face. Augusta recognized him immediately, from the portrait; he, on the contrary, could not think how to interpret this juggling, as it appeared to him.

"Whom have I the honor of seeing before me?" asked the Lieutenant at last, in the greatest embarrassment.

"What a curious, silly question!" cried the post-inspector, smiling. "This is your *fiancée*; do you not recognize her again of whom you were just speaking?"

"No, in truth," said the Lieutenant, bow-

ing; "every man would doubtless be proud of a union with this beautiful young lady; but I have been for some months engaged to your niece, Miss Stolzenbeck in F——."

The post-inspector stood there, as if just dropped from the clouds.

"What," cried he, "not engaged to my daughter Augusta! Then perhaps you did not send your portrait by Major Sterner?"

"Oh yes, that is quite right; but with regard to the rest, I truly do not understand one word of it."

"If you admit, sir, that you sent the miniature," cried the irritated post-inspector, "then you must also know that you wrote to my daughter, and requested her hand?"

"I wrote to your daughter, and requested her hand!" Lieutenant Sterner stared at the post-inspector in a way which betrayed that he thought his mind must be somewhat deranged.

"Yes, indeed," continued Mr. Von Spalden, "we have the letter, and the inclosed will; but perhaps you know nothing of that."

"But yes, I know the will quite well, and now begin to perceive that my name has caused all this misunderstanding. I am not the Constantine Sterner who is there made mention of; we are cousins."

The post-inspector, who could not suppress his anger any longer, broke forth,

"Are all men called Sterner; all Sterners, Constantine, and are they all adventurers who travel to other countries, to rob other honest people of their lawful inheritance, and then to make fools of them with intrigues and tricks? But the portrait, my honored Sir, how does it please you to explain that? Why did you send it to my daughter?"

"It is true that I sent a miniature by Major Sterner," answered the Lieutenant; "but it was intended for my betrothed, Henrietta Stolzenbeck. What it has got to do with the case, we must learn from my cousin, who is at present here. Permit me, therefore, to go and seek him." He now turned to Augusta and said, "The strange way in which I have had the honor of making your acquaintance, will always be remembered by me. And if the man who will one day possess this," here he took Augusta's hand, "were not so much esteemed and beloved by me, I could envy him it. As it is, I can only congratulate him, that fate has destined for his noble heart such an invaluable prize."

The Lieutenant bowed respectfully to Augusta, then with hasty steps went toward the door, but before his hand touched the handle it was opened from without, and the Major entered.

"Excuse me, Mr. Von Spalden, that I have returned so soon; but I was informed that one of my cousins from Hamburg had arrived, and was seeking me. I could no longer subdue my impatience to welcome my long expected friend."

The two friends shook hands with unfeigned delight; in Sterner's features, however, there was an unusual expression of intense anxiety, which did not escape Augusta's observation, as she sat there a silent spectator. Augusta also thought she remarked that the Major asked the Lieutenant with a peculiarly expressive look, and with more than usual elevation of voice, what his cousin, who had been left behind was doing, and if he had seen him before his departure from Hamburg.

"His health is excellent, but his time is much occupied, which was possibly the reason why I did not see him when I paid my farewell visit."

"You do not know, therefore, if he will be here next month. But I suppose you have letters from him?"

"Yes, he did me this honor. He sent me by his servant a large packet for you, with many friendly remembrances."

"But permit me, gentlemen," said the post-inspector, making a sign to Augusta to leave them; "permit me: all this appears to me very curious, or, at least, not quite clear. How was it, Major, that you gave the portrait of this young gentleman to my daughter, which was, as he says, destined for his betrothed? and why did you then say that it came from the heir, and was the same picture which he had mentioned in his letter to Augusta, and which you, Major, as his proxy, had with you? Will it please you, Major Sterner, to give me a few explanations on this subject?"

"With much pleasure," answered Sterner. "When I left Hamburg I received two portraits, the one from my cousin, who is present, for his *fiancée*, the other from the heir, or from the intended husband of your daughter. Unfortunately I forgot my desk in which I had put the one designed for Miss Stolzenbeck; the other for your daughter, however, I brought with me. As we are all three cousins, there is nothing so very strange in the sport with which Fate has amused herself in moulding the Constantine in Hamburg, and the Constantine Sterner, who now stands before you, as if it were in the same form. Their resemblance is, indeed, very great, although not so striking when they are seen together. And now I hope I have explained the matter to your satisfaction."

"Hum—hum! Not entirely," murmured the post-inspector; "the resemblance is much too striking, and the history of the portraits something, in truth, very singular."

"At least it happens oddly, the post-inspector meant to say," added Sterner; "for this occurrence can in no other way have claims to singularity. If you entertain the slightest doubt of the veracity of what I have just stated to you, you are quite welcome to make more satisfactory inquiries on the spot."

With these words the Major took his cousin's arm, and bowing slightly, they withdrew.

"Cursed babbler!" exclaimed the post-inspector to himself, when the young gentlemen were gone: "he knows that I have no other negotiator for my private affairs in Hamburg but himself; I should, therefore, like to know how I should be able to get further information in so ticklish a matter as this. But all is not right, I see that clearly. The young gentleman there, with his baby's face seemed so embarrassed. Zounds! suppose he really is the right one; but before the will was drawn up, had engaged himself to my fashionable sister's still more fashionable daughter; and now with the advice and help of the refined Major, is working out a plan by which he can secure the girl without losing his property! Hem, hem! what advantage could the Major draw from it? and what is the use of this pantomime with me?"

The post-inspector paced the room in deep thought.

"I must go to the Burgomaster's—I will tell him all, and leave it to his penetration to unravel the whole affair."

Having come to this determination, the post-inspector took his hat and stick and set off; but before he had got half way down the street his excitement was cooled. He stood still, and began to reflect.

"Can one possibly turn into a joke matters of so serious a nature? At all events, is the Burgomaster's head more clever than mine? might he not, probably, silently laugh at my expense when he learns my suspicions against Sterner, and the truly ludicrous mistake about his cousin? Do I not lay myself open to ridicule? Do I not, in a certain measure, admit the possibility that they have made a fool of me—a Von Spalden: and then, again, is it not possible that the heir might come before I received from Hamburg a clue to these follies?"

The answer to these questions, which the post-inspector put to himself, has remained a secret; the result was, however, that Mr. Von Spalden turned back, and ended his monologue on his way home by again groaning forth the question: "Will the heir ever come at all?"

The reader will obtain an answer to this at some future time.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FRIENDS.—THE SOLEMN PROMISE.

Who can tell what love is? Love is a sentiment not to be defined.—OERLENSCHLAGER.

"HARK ye, my little Mrs. Hjertberg," said Major Sterner patting his landlady on the

shoulder, "take care that this note is sent as soon as possible to the hotel, for this gentleman starts as early as three o'clock to-morrow morning. Then be so good as to let me have supper and a bottle of port wine, in my room, by ten o'clock: and, for the third and last thing, I beg you will see to it that we are not disturbed before or after supper. May I hope, my dear landlady, that you will take care of all this?"

"You can be perfectly satisfied that all shall be as you desire, Major Sterner, answered Mrs. Hjertberg, cheerfully.

The elder Sterner now led his guest up to the well-known room which looked out upon the court. The latter flung himself carelessly into a chair, and burst into a loud peal of laughter.

"Well, that was the most ludicrous scene I ever witnessed in all my life," exclaimed he at last, as he dried his eyes. "You can not imagine any thing more foolish than the old fellow's face when he discovered his mistake, and his anger that I was not the longed-for heir, who could alone free him from the anxiety which seemed to torment him most; namely, the idea that you might, in an underhand manner, be influencing the girl's feelings against the rich suitor. He distinctly gave me to understand that the heir had set a fox to watch the geese when he chose you, my dear Alexander, as his ambassador! Ha, ha, ha!"

"So, indeed," said the Major, smiling; "even in that short while he found time to acquaint you with his suspicions. The post-inspector is by no means a good man: not that he is exactly bad; but, to a very despotic disposition, he unites an obstinacy which can not be overcome by any argument of reason—it is only a wonder to me that, with such a perverse education, Augusta has become what she is."

"Yes," cried the Lieutenant, warmly, springing up, "she is an angel, an ideal of all that is beautiful and perfect. On my honor, Alexander, I declare to you she is, indeed, charming. Believe me, you know I am a judge of beauty. The damsel is a perfect jewel."

"By Jove, what fine speeches you are making. But let me remind you, with all these effusions of admiration, that she is engaged as well as yourself. At the same time I beg you to excuse my sincerity if I take the liberty of assuring you, that your opinion of her is worth little more than nothing, and therefore can not possibly influence mine. You only judge the whole female sex by their exterior. Augusta, although she perhaps has just claims to the admiration which you pay to her beauty, possesses other qualities which I prize much more, which, however, you, my beloved cousin, can not appreciate either in her, or in any other daughter of Eve, because, as I have already remark-

ed, your powers of judgment are limited only to the outward shell."

"Perhaps my good cousin would have the kindness to remember, that as yet, I have shown no craving for a portion of his heavenly wisdom. My dwarf soul has certainly never cherished the presumptuous idea, of comparing itself in the one or the other respect with the sublime genius enthroned in my dear cousin's matchless brain. Therefore I do not consider it worth the trouble to pay any attention to the pleasing and satisfactory opinion with which my beloved relative has entertained of his guest, but rather let it go in at one ear and out at the other, and continue our conversation with the assurance that from the maiden's face I can unerringly judge of her inward qualities. 'The face is the looking-glass of the soul,' has been said by some wise man, although he did not gain his wisdom from the same source as you. Thus you see, my friend, that the wisdom of the dwarf soul is of a more practical nature than that of your sublime genius. I judge from the impression which a person makes on me at first sight, and judge almost always correctly. You, on the contrary, judge after years of acquaintance, after one has had time to delude you with the appearance of virtues, which one does not possess, or to hide faults from you which one has, the consequence of which is, that you judge incorrectly. Don't be astonished, dear Alexander! you must know that I, as the proverb says, 'Learnt my trade in Hamburg.' But among other things I have learnt to prove what I state with facts. For instance, Augusta Von Spalden, I saw her at the first glance to be an angel, a rare jewel; that is to say, an angel in beauty and virtue, a rare jewel in brilliancy and worth. Is this not rightly judged? You must admit that she possesses these qualities; and if you, in order to go to work very wisely, intend to put to the test the existence of these qualities until she should have attained the mature age of fifty or sixty, you will come to no other result, except perhaps in reference to the beauty, which during the time of trial may have undergone a slight change. Further, what do you say to my *fiancée*, Henrietta Von Stolzenbeck? I fell in love with her at the first glance; for I saw that she is neither an angel nor a rare jewel."

"I will willingly admit that your judgments are unerring if you only will spare me all this nonsense," said the Major, smiling; "the very fact that you fell in love because you found the object of your admiration to be neither angel nor jewel, proves sufficiently the worth of your reasoning."

"We will have done with nonsense, but you must hear me to the end. It pleases you to find it extraordinary that I should fall in love with a girl, though she is neither an angel nor a precious jewel. But it does not

follow that she must be the very opposite. She is none the worse for having some terrestrial qualities mixed with the celestial. You remember that the children of Israel even got tired of the heavenly manna, why then should not we? My Henrietta is beautiful, but she is not divinely beautiful. This assures me, that I can exclusively pay her attention, and that I have no fear of seeing a host of admirers near her, such as gather round an angelic beauty; so, in this respect, I am better off. As far as regards heavenly goodness, it is certainly very desirable; but a little earthly addition does no harm. People mix copper with gold, otherwise it would be too flexible and soft. It appears to me that I should soon get tired, if I were married to a woman, who, out of pure heavenly goodness, never had a different opinion or another will than mine; but who, without the slightest opposition, obeyed with blind submission, my perhaps often capricious wishes and fancies. This would be as little agreeable to me as to be always contradicted, and to have none of my wishes complied with without quarreling and dissension. Curiously enough it appears to be human nature to like obstacles and contradictions only for the great pleasure of defying and overcoming them. What were life without opposition? Nothing but a miserable void, an animal existence, without feeling for pleasure or pain. No, my dear Alexander, the battle gives renown to the conqueror; and although marriage need not necessarily be one incessant scene of battles and victories, still the common maxim applies here when it is kept within bounds. Thus I think that a middle course is best, and I hope I have convinced you that I not only can judge Miss Von Spalden's and my *fiancée's* qualities correctly, but that I have done so; so also, that the qualities of the latter are such that they agree with my character and way of thinking, and that she, therefore, is the one particularly calculated to make me happy. That is, according to my ideas of matrimonial bliss. And lastly, I can not help wishing that you will treasure up in your heart, and act upon what I have just told you of the way of judging mankind."

"My good Constantine," answered the Major, "what you have just said contains some truths, but is mostly a mass of consummate nonsense, which hardly deserves a sensible thought. Your character and your mode of thinking are good in the main, although your ardent spirit leads you to treat a subject with thoughtless frivolity which is of much too noble and serious a nature to become an object of laughter. May your experience in your views of matrimonial happiness not prove to be bitter! But Henrietta is certainly a sweet, captivating girl, somewhat coquetish, and not a little vain; however, as far as I am able to judge, she has a

good heart, and with this you can not be without hope of becoming a happy married man."

"Yes, one has tolerable grounds for this supposition," said the Lieutenant, smilingly curling his mustache. "But, enough of this. Explain to me now how you could be so bold as to rob my betrothed even for one moment of the pleasure of beholding my picture? Be so good as to look at me, Alexander! and further, tell me how you, the personification of seriousness, truth, and honesty, could carry on this farce with our good post-inspector?"

"Hush, hush!" said Sterner, drawing his chair nearer. "If you had not left Hamburg so much sooner than was first fixed on, you would have received my letter, and got some insight into the matter. Luckily you conducted yourself at the post-inspector's more rationally than I could have expected of you." Sterner sat awhile silent and thoughtful; an expression of displeasure clouded his handsome, manly features. "Have you the portfolio with the letters, Constantine?" asked he, without noticing his cousin's annoyance at not being answered. The Lieutenant brought what he desired. After he had examined the seals and addresses, he broke open a large letter, and put the others back until a more suitable time. After he had read this he seemed to be lost awhile in reflection, then, as if he had come to a resolution, he said to his cousin: "You are thoughtless, Constantine, but you have a good heart. Can I trust you with my confidence, and will you keep it?"

"Truly," answered the Lieutenant, smiling, "you hold my abilities in no very brilliant light; but as you seem to have taken upon yourself to be the monitor of the last branch of the Sterner house, and I have resolved not to be angry with you to-night, I will let this pass like your other complimentary speeches. I declare myself therefore ready to receive your confidence, and to do whatever you wish."

"Only a fool promises to do a thing before he knows what the question is. I do not require that you should swear any thing until you have heard me; but the matter is of the utmost importance to me, and must not be treated with your usual thoughtlessness. Consider well before you give your promise; and if it be once given, I pray you of all things to remember who has received it."

"Well, come to the point at once," cried the lively Constantine; "I hate a long preface worse than the cholera-morbus. Therefore I beg you will not try my patience any longer. I shall listen to you with the greatest possible attention, and if you think fit, devote a whole quarter of an hour to reflect before you receive my answer."

The Major now began an explanation of the matters which he considered so import-

ant; but as it is not yet necessary that the reader should be made acquainted with the purport of the conversation, we pass it over for the present.

During the whole supper nothing was said. There lingered a comical expression on the Lieutenant's face; only his friend's more than usually serious and solemn manner seemed to check the young man's mirth, which he evidently tried to keep down. At the end of the meal, Sterner filled his glass, stood up, and said:

"Constantine, you know me; my friendship is not to be despised. May this glass seal our union for a lifetime, and may it be impossible for either of us to tarnish his honor by faithlessness!"

Hereupon the friends touched glasses. The Lieutenant, who truly entertained a sincere friendship for his cousin, a friendship based on unlimited esteem became instantly serious. Every trace of laughter disappeared from his handsome, youthful countenance, and with extreme kindness in his tone and manner, he answered:

"Strange as your secret is, Alexander, be assured that I shall hold it sacred, even if I did not feel such unbounded friendship for you as really is the case. I pledge myself, therefore, under penalty of forfeiting your confidence and my honor, not to misuse it, and to fulfill what I have bound myself to do."

The friends shook each other heartily by the hand, and, on taking leave, the Major said:

"Farewell, Constantine, remember me to Henrietta; but never let her have the slightest suspicion of your secret; for, mark well my words, if she once gets a clew, let it be ever so slight, her *finesse*, flattery, and coaxing will draw from you every thing, until she is mistress of the whole web, which I have just laid in your hands, entirely disentangled."

"Fear nothing," answered Constantine; he pressed the Major's hand, and sprang into the carriage, which rolled off with him.

CHAPTER XX.

MATERNAL ADVICE.

LET us now cast a glance at Augusta, and the mixed feelings which agitated her on her return to her own room, after Sterner's and her father's departure. She recalled to her memory each look, each word of Sterner's, and the more she reflected on them the more confused became her ideas as to the construction she ought to put upon his words and behavior. She could not clearly explain to herself the curious mixture of confidence, tenderness, and reserve which Sterner had showed. She hoped, because

she wished it, that Sterner entertained a fervent attachment for her; she felt it was so, and she was just as much convinced that he knew she returned this affection with the whole warmth of a young heart.

"And should he even have doubted it," thought she, "this last accident must have assured him of it. But why this odd, exaggerated feeling of honor, of which he is always speaking? How can this prevent him from making his thoughts more openly known, and from releasing me from the dreadful uneasiness and anxiety in which he knows I am. Yet far from availing himself of the influence which he has acquired over my heart, he encourages me to dwell on the merits of the expected suitor. His love and constancy are my only hope, but between my father's authority and the fear of the unknown suitor's arrival this hope is gradually disappearing. If Sterner (in case he is only trying my affection for him) only knew how unnecessary it is, how many severe storms, now impending, might be turned aside. Alas! and when he is once here, that dreaded man, whom I so unjustly hate and abhor beforehand, how shall I gain courage to free myself from the influence of his unfortunate claims, since they are grounded on that mad will, and thus inseparably united to the pecuniary interests."

Thus far had Augusta proceeded in her meditations, when the post-inspector suddenly called her, and led the astonished girl before the equally bewildered Lieutenant. Augusta's surprise and fright when she recognized the dreaded guest, struck her dumb, and she did not recover her senses again, until she heard him declare that he was engaged to her cousin Henrietta Stolzenbeck, words which sounded like angelic music to Augusta's ears. She was too happy to be able to express her delight at the unexpected light which this declaration seemed to cast over affairs; but her father's disgraceful behavior covered her cheeks with blushes of shame. It is true Augusta perceived that much was mysterious and odd; but she listened only to the silent presentiments of her heart, which whispered to her, that all would yet end well; but quickly the magic images which her imagination had conjured up were dispersed, when the Major arrived, and inquired after the welfare of a third cousin, his commands and letters, and spoke of his coming, as of quite a settled affair. There was then a third. At this disheartening news, which destroyed all her castles in the air, Augusta was glad to be allowed to return to her own chamber, the only asylum where she dared to indulge her feelings, grief, and tears. Here she sought to arrange her confused thoughts, but her head swam. One thing, however, remained clear and distinct in her memory; Sterner's strange look and his emotion, when he shook hands with his

cousin; but this might as well be a bad as a good sign, or purely accidental. Poor Augusta could not see her way clearly at all.

In the course of an hour her mother entered the room, with eyes red with weeping, and evidently much depressed by some painful feeling. Her daughter silently gave her a chair, then whispered, while she with childlike emotion carried her mother's hand to her lips—

"So sad, my dear mother! has something else happened?"

"You know best, my Augusta," answered Mrs. Von Spalden, mildly, as she looked inquiringly into her face; "I do not speak of the foolish, ridiculous scene with the supposed heir, but of the one which possibly took place before. You may remember that a little household matter called me away; I was detained somewhat long in the kitchen, and on returning met your father in the drawing-room. In expressions which I shall not repeat, he called me to account for the excited state in which he found not only you, but the Major. I have paid dearly for the confidence which I placed in you when I left you alone, and yet I feel perfectly sure that you have not been unworthy of it. Let me hope and believe, my Augusta, that your father has made himself uneasy without cause. The thought that Augusta could perhaps have forgotten what she owes to herself, that she could for an instant have forgotten that a woman whose hand is no longer free must even guard against the chosen of her heart, causes me the utmost uneasiness."

Augusta stood before her mother with eyes cast down. She felt too well that she was guilty of what her mother called, *forgetting herself*; but the dear image still dwelt in her heart. It was painted there in fresh, faithful colors, and she could not possibly believe that it was something criminal to return the love of a noble, upright man, or that it was a breach of duty to neglect keeping her heart for a man who had never sought to win it, and of whom personally she was entirely unacquainted.

"Speak, my daughter," said Mrs. Von Spalden, "you ought to keep nothing secret from your mother; I also was once young, and felt something then which I fear you now feel; but my joy was short. The roses of life died, yet they faded not quite for me, for the consciousness of having done one's duty is a glorious reward."

Augusta sank weeping into her mother's arms; she confessed all—her warm unconquerable love for Sterner, and her belief that he returned it; although she could not understand the motives which prevented him from owning it openly. Finally, she begged her mother to stand by her when the decisive struggle came for the preservation of her liberty; until—. Augusta blushed and hesitated.

"Until the Major has formally proposed for you, do you mean?" interrupted Mrs. Von Spalden, with a faint smile. "But, my child, you must perceive that it is impossible for me to do as you desire. A wife—and what is more, a wife who during the whole course of her married life has never had another will but her husband's, until that passive state from time and habit has become almost second nature—how can you imagine that such a wife could dare openly to oppose him? Then, that I should secretly work against my husband's plans, and by deceit try to frustrate them; this, I presume, my Augusta would not wish."

"No, my dear mother; I see that in this respect you can do nothing; only promise me that you will not blame me, and that your tender heart will ever remain a refuge for your daughter, where she can deposit her griefs and seek, if not help from her sorrows, at least sympathy and encouragement."

"Certainly, my dearest Augusta," said Mrs. Von Spalden, caressingly, while she put back her daughter's shining brown hair from off her forehead; "certainly, you shall have all this from me. Be assured, you may expect all from me that a mother, whose greatest wish is the happiness of her child, can do in accordance with her duty to her husband. You have, certainly, not done right, and I do not approve of your imprudence in giving your heart to a man who has not yet positively declared his own intentions; and who, to say the least of it, by his knowledge of your feelings, has good reason to consider it very indiscreet that a girl, who is aware of his admiration, does not try to subdue a feeling which, under such circumstances, is not permitted her; but what is done can not be undone. Come what may, you have brought it upon yourself, and I will only remind you, that if unmerited misfortune is hard to bear, that which we bring upon ourselves is much harder."

"But, my dear mother," said Augusta, "I can not persuade myself, nor can any one convince me, that my union with another is inevitable. I admit that if this had been the case, Sterner would certainly have had grounds to consider me in the highest degree indiscreet and thoughtless; but as this is only a talked-of, not a settled matter, I do not see why I should stifle a feeling which no one has proved to me to be wrong. And besides, would it be any misfortune if the man for whom I am reserved, were to go hence without me? he would retain, at all events, what was most essential, viz. the money, for my person was only an addition. Thus his loss is nothing, and mine, if possible, still less; for I then might keep what I value most—liberty to choose for myself. I am perfectly sure, that as soon as the heir has gone, Sterner will no longer delay a declaration which is even now only necessary for

form's sake. His honor, and the promise he has made his Hamburg friend, will doubly prevent it for the present."

"Alas! my child," sighed Mrs. Von Spalden, "be assured that your union with the heir *will* take place, even though you pray and beseech your father to spare you; he will make use of the same means as my deceased father did, when he deprived me of my choice about my marriage with your father: and as to Sterner's expected declaration, he acts more wisely than you: he lets matters take their course. Do you the same, Augusta; but of all things be cautious in your intercourse with the Major: watch each word, each look. Remember that you have not yet seen, do not know him whom you so much fear and hate: a change in your feelings would be no miracle. Many, and possibly the greater number, are not united to the object who first taught them that they had a heart; and yet, Augusta, the joys and pleasures of life are not lost to them."

"A change in my way of thinking seems to me impossible," answered Augusta, "but I shall treasure up in my heart your kind motherly advice. Toward Sterner, I shall be reserve itself. I think he is trying me, and he shall not be deceived. I think I feel more tranquil since I have unburdened my mind to you, dearest mother."

Mrs. Von Spalden embraced her daughter, and as she at the same time observed her husband through the window, returning so suddenly from his intended visit to the Burgomaster, she hastened to meet him, curious to learn what had brought him back.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MEETING.—THE REPORT.—DISAPPOINTED HOPES.

"CEASE a while with your trifling nonsense," said Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck to her daughter. "And you, my dear Constantine, come and sit by me on the sofa, so that I may get proper answers to my questions."

Henrietta sullenly took up her work: Constantine kissed the hand of his charming *fiancée*, and whispered, "Ah! how disagreeable, dear Henrietta!" then he betook himself with a graceful bow, to the seat which his future mother-in-law pointed out to him.

"So," she began, "you did not know this cousin personally before you went to Hamburg?"

"No, not in the least."

"To think that my brother could be such an old fool as to leave his sister such a pitance, and to bequeath to an adventurer, an artful unknown man, the whole fruits of twenty years' toil and labor. And I even sent you there to set things to rights. How

soon, before the old fellow's death, did you arrive in Hamburg?"

"About six weeks."

"Well, and you went immediately to wait upon him? And what did he say?"

"As soon as I had rested from my journey, I presented myself at the old gentleman's. He received me politely, and asked what were my commands. In answer to this, I gave him your letters, and added, according to your express commands: 'That as some private affairs had brought me to Hamburg, I had accepted with pleasure the charge with which my future mother-in-law had honored me, particularly as I should then have an opportunity of making the acquaintance of a person who merited and enjoyed general esteem, and who had long possessed the unbounded and sincere friendship and love of his sister!'"

"Well, what did the old bear answer to that?"

"You shall hear! With the most icy, cold, and disdainful smile, he answered: 'So, is that it? Be so good as to take a seat; I will see what my lady sister does me the favor to write!'—I sat opposite to him, and counted by the clock how many times I could turn my hat round in a minute. At last he finished reading. He rose from the sofa, and said, in the same cold tone and manner,

"My sister is indeed too good, and it would really be too great a sacrifice for her, at her time of life, to undertake so long a journey, to take care of an old man, who, for the last twenty years, has been accustomed to do without the tender attention of his near relations. In another part of the world, and under circumstances, which furnished me with an opportunity of proving what could be the extent of regard and friendship, I have found a heart, which is sufficient for me. Moreover, sir, the most skillful physicians of Hamburg have already said that my days are numbered, and I feel myself that I have not long to live. Therefore, a journey here would be to no purpose; particularly as my will is already drawn up, and not a letter of it shall ever be altered. In this last record of my wishes, I have neither forgotten her nor my brother. This is all I have got to answer you, and thus I hope, sir, you will easily perceive, that in this matter we have nothing more to communicate to each other.' I bowed, without saying a word, and was about to leave my unamiable host, when he, with quite a different expression in the tone of his voice, and with a frankness that surprised me, continued: 'My young friend, it was not at all my intention that on this account we should so soon part, and still less would I offend you or my sister. We can converse on many subjects, but, first of all, I must know where you are living.' I named the hotel where I had put up. 'Come,' added he, 'that is not so far from

here. But if you will give me pleasure, and would agreeably surprise my two friends Sterner by a meeting with a countryman and relation, you will come and live with me, and put up with what the house of an old bachelor can offer. The Sterners will not be home before the evening; therefore you can, if the proposition is agreeable to you, have your things brought to my house at once.' You can easily imagine that I thanked him with unfeigned delight. 'How rejoiced, especially my good Constantine will be,' continued the old man quite pleased, 'when he meets you, and if I am not mistaken,' smilingly added he, 'your private affairs will not occupy much of your time.' I felt that I colored, and that he remarked it. 'Do not make yourself uneasy,' added he good-naturedly, 'a future mother-in-law, and a beautiful *fiancée*, might easily induce an honest fellow to adopt a little of their policy, moreover, I excuse you, if there be any thing to excuse, as I know from past days the character and disposition of my sister.' I assure you these were his own words. The same day I became a member of his truly agreeable household."

"The miserable old fool, the arrant knave!" cried Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck, with suppressed anger, as she picked at the corner of her fine cambric pocket-handkerchief. After a pause, she continued: "I am surprised, however, that you, as you were so fortunate as to become a guest in the house, and daily met the old man, did not make better use of the opportunity for your own and your future family's advantage. Why did you not undermine the absurd confidence, and foolish predilection which the old man had taken for the adventurer?"

"That I could not really do, my dear lady. First, because neither I nor either of my cousins knew what the will contained; then, on the day on which it was signed and sealed in the presence of witnesses, Mr. Von Spalden himself proposed a little pleasure-trip. But even if I had known the true state of affairs, it would have been impossible for me to make a man of Rudolph Von Spalden's principles change his will; and, besides, I should have considered it beneath me, to repay with such a base act, the truly genuine hospitality with which your kind relation received me during the whole of my stay in Hamburg."

"Well, I have had enough of this nonsense," angrily exclaimed Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck: "I see you have imbibed the sentimental ideas of your excellent cousin, the Major; but let me tell you, that such romantic whims do not become a sensible man, and betray a deficiency of sound judgment. Can you really be so simple as to imagine, that the heir did not know the contents of the will; and that he had not long ago, by his intrigues, paved his way to it? Yes,

rely on my experience, the plan was settled since the romantic adventure at the tiger-hunt, when the old man's life was possibly intentionally placed in danger—or, perhaps, even before this adventure. And the folly of mixing up that girl, his niece, in the will! do you think that such an idea could have originated in my old brother's brain? No, it is perfectly impossible! He promised the last time he left Sweden to provide for her, and I therefore had reason to suppose that he had made her his heiress; but, as the adventurer doubtless knew the old man's weakness for her, he patched together the mad will, to unite his own advantage with my brother's weakness, which this simple fool in his ridiculous blindness approved of, and adopted as his wish. You have allowed your excellent monitor and noble friend, the Major, to impose upon you by the affecting story of the tiger-hunt, and the farce of the firm and unparalleled friendship which "it caused between my brother and the adventurer. Doubtless he received a reward from his cousin for his services; and it was all done that you should make no attempt to turn the old man's thoughts more in accordance with the interests of his family."

Although it might have appeared to be an unheard-of boldness, to throw the slightest doubt on the correctness of Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck's judgment, which, until now, had been looked upon by her neighbors as infallible, yet Constantine could not refrain from defending the person whose honor she so unsparingly attacked; but all his endeavors to influence the haughty woman's opinions were in vain. She plentifully possessed one quality, in which she much resembled her brother, the post-inspector, namely, a decided dislike to every kind of contradiction. This could always draw her out of her usual serenity, and it was the case now.

"Constantine," said she, coldly, "he who can so warmly defend a person who was cunning enough to alienate from his relations the affections of a man once right-minded and well-inclined toward them—he that can thus defend such a one, is, in my opinion, capable of any folly. Remember that many engagements have been broken from slighter causes."

At these unexpected words Henrietta began to weep; but Constantine rose with more dignity and determination than they had ever observed in him. Anger and pain were depicted on his countenance, he looked severely at Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck, and replied in a firm and serious tone:

"Madam, I consider my union with your daughter as the greatest happiness of my life, but my honor is still dearer to me. I will rather, if it be necessary, sacrifice the wish of my heart, than be guilty of a base or unworthy action. Constantine Sterner will never requite true friendship with malicious and contemptible ingratitude!"

If the Major had seen Constantine at this moment, he would hardly have recognized the happy and thoughtless youth. Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck found it best, at least for the present, not to look upon her menace as in earnest. With a sort of expiatory smile she added:

"Well, well, it was not meant to go so far. Besides, I can not judge of the extent of the obligations you have received; but that they have not extended to those for whom you undertook the journey, I do know!"

"Now, dear Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck, if friendship must necessarily be measured by the scale of selfishness, permit me to remind you, that the services rendered to me have been also of advantage to you," said Constantine, who was easily reconciled. "May it please you just to remember, that the not so insignificant sum, which was raised in your name, and sent after me, has remained untouched; for, by the hospitality of your brother and his favorite, I did not require it. If, during my stay of nearly six months in Hamburg, I had been maintained at your cost, you may be assured that no trifling part of the sum which I now bring back undiminished would have disappeared."

"That is very possible," answered Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck, for she clearly saw that the matter was not to be disputed. "Tell me, now, something of the old man's illness and death."

"There is not much to relate, dear madam. My cousin and I generally spent the forenoon in his society. The old gentleman was then almost always in a good-humor, and I consider these among the most agreeable and instructive hours which I have ever passed. While relating about his travels in India, he showed such varied information, and such great knowledge of mankind, that he quite captivated the attention of his hearers. In the afternoon he always withdrew to his own bed-room, because his bodily sufferings became then more severe. The last fortnight he did not leave his room, and very seldom allowed any one, and then only his favorite to see him. At the end of this time he died."

"When the will was opened, the books and other documents looked through, the heir found that it was impossible for him to take less than six months to arrange the concerns of the departed, before he could return to Sweden, and your affairs also detained me; but as the Major left immediately, the heir took advantage of the opportunity, and persuaded this sincere and tried friend to be his proxy, in regard to the curious point in the testament as well as in other affairs. He also sent through him his portrait to his unknown destined bride, with commands to observe her character. But it was his resolve, in case the young lady objected to his claims, not to insist upon a marriage with her, and to re-

sign to her the half of the property. For he knew that his deceased friend tenderly loved this niece, and had promised to provide for her in future, although friendship had prevailed on him to make a union with him a condition in the will."

"Yes, yes," said Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck, with a disdainful smile; "that does not sound badly, but I doubt not that he would rather take the girl as she is than sacrifice the half of the handsome property, for I presume she does not possess the innumerable good qualities, which possibly the highly sentimental Major requires in a wife; which, however, according to the usual circumstances of married life, can very well be dispensed with, even though one is glad to see them here and there in a novel for effect's sake."

"There is not a doubt, on the contrary, my dear Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck, that when this Sterner *does* see Miss Von Spalden, that part of the testament which gives him hope of possessing her will be considered the most auspicious; for in this maiden there seems to be united every charm. It is true I only had the happiness of seeing her for a few minutes, but I must admit that I have scarcely ever beheld a more beautiful face, a more perfect figure, or more complete harmony in the *tout ensemble*."

"Constantine!" cried Henrietta, half angry, half in fun, as she sprang up and threw her work far from her—"what a description! I am almost inclined to think that my beautiful cousin has made a conquest of my admirer. Beware of such bold expressions; for I fancy I feel already the symptoms of jealousy."

At this moment Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck was called away, and joyfully as a bird who has regained its liberty, Constantine flew from the sofa to his Henrietta's side, and quieted her fears with the whole powers of his eloquence. She was easily consoled; for, in truth, she had too much self-love, and too much confidence in the power of her own charms, seriously to fear the influence of another.

The conversation during the rest of the evening turned principally on one subject—namely, the delightful round of amusements which they would have during their trip to Ulriksdal, which Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck was thinking of buying again, and of which they were going to take a preparatory survey.

CHAPTER XXII.

STERNER'S MONOLOGUE.

AFTER Constantine's departure the Major had not sought rest. In deep thought he walked up and down the room. At times he seemed to wrestle with himself; his unsteady, hasty step marked a man whose soul

D

was violently agitated by a powerful, mighty passion.

"Can there possibly be any thing criminal, any thing base in this action? Can I, by it, cast a stain on a life which I have endeavored to preserve pure until now?" said he, in an under tone. "But why do I ask myself these questions? why this hesitation? Would the answer of an approving conscience linger evasive, or fail, if my design were blameless? Pride, selfishness! is it you who whisper to me to accomplish it—and why? Perhaps only to satisfy a vanity, which I only now for the first time think I observe in myself!"

He sat down, and leant his head thoughtfully on his hand.

"No, no, it is not vanity! I will not, I can not accuse myself of that. It must be my exaggerated idea of right and wrong which produces this doubt."

He was silent. As if by magic the dark ideas seemed to vanish, and as it were, bright joyous representations of his excited imagination took their place. A smile played upon his lips; his dark eye flashed with unusual fire.

"It is not wrong, and it shall be possible, it shall be certain," cried he, loudly and almost joyfully. "Yes, then I shall know a happiness, which will outweigh the toils and struggles of so many years. He who, from his youth upward, has known no heart that has felt, suffered, and rejoiced with him—who has always stood alone, and with the most ardent longing sought for a being who could have harmonized with him, and never found it—only he can understand my boundless joy, if all go well."

Sterner now took out the letters again which Constantine had given him, and which during their conversation had been laid aside. He opened them, looked through many documents, and the longer he continued this occupation the more entirely disappeared the hesitating, disquiet expression of his countenance.

It was about six o'clock in the morning when he was roused by the rattling of a peasant's cart, which drove into the court. Sterner looked through the window, and perceived that it was his servant Westerlind, who jumped from it. Immediately after he entered the room, greeted Sterner with his usual humble civility, and brought a thousand kind remembrances from the parsonage of Wallaryd.

"Well, what news, Westerlind?" asked the Major.

"I have the honor to inform you, that all the arrangements under Mrs. Svallenius's and my superintendence progress with so much activity, that it is a pleasure to behold them. Every thing is in bloom, from the potatoes to the beautiful auriculas and white roses; and in the corner of each bed Mrs. Svallenius has sown, with her own hands.

the first letters of your name in Indian-creases. I believe, therefore, that you will be very contented with every thing, if, as we hope, you will visit the place at Easter."

"Now all this pleases me extremely, my good Westerlind," said the Major, laughing. "Is the painting of the green corner room already finished? You know I intend to take possession of that myself."

"All is ready for my master's reception, but, for the present, that is the only room which can boast of a tidy appearance. Last Tuesday, Mademoiselle Björk and Anna were there by their mistress's orders, to wash the windows, put up the curtains, and to cover the furniture with the red and white calico covers. A strange scene took place then. Mademoiselle Björk received a box on the ear from Madame, who called her a goose, because she wished to have the green bombasin covers in the corner chamber, but Mrs. Svallenius insisted that they should be used in the heir's bedroom."

"Poor Mademoiselle Björk! What a pity!" answered the Major. "But I must allow that the lady was right. I hope that you did not neglect to lend your aid to the ladies, who came from the parsonage to Sorby, in all those little services, and also that you, as then acting the host, did not omit to regale them with whatever the house afforded?"

"Naturally, sir, I neglected neither the one nor the other; I constantly held either the stool or table upon which Mademoiselle Björk stood, to hang up the curtains. A whole day I was on my knees by the side of Miss Anna while she was fastening the red covers on the chairs; I turned them round, and handed the pins to her, and when at last we had finished in the evening, we took our supper together."

"Well, I see you have punctually fulfilled your duty. Now give me the letters, and go down stairs and get something to refresh yourself."

Westerlind drew forth his letter-case, handed his master two letters, bowed and retired. One was from the master of the workmen, and related to the building in the court; the other from Mr. Svallenius, and ran thus:

"MUCH ESTEEMED AND DEAR FRIEND—It is with great satisfaction that I can inform you, that the improvements in Sorby are progressing quickly and well. My good wife, heaven be praised, goes there twice a week, and I myself have taken a trip thither to consult with the inspector about a critical matter, relating to the continuation of the former contract with Lieutenant-colonel Stålkrona, about the mills in Sorby Park. The inspector declares, that the greatest part of the best meadows were under water the whole summer, and this year's crop was

almost entirely lost, and that these fields, on account of the inundation, could scarcely be used as pasture ground. The Lieutenant-colonel, on the contrary, insists that the mischief caused by the dam would be more than sufficiently made up for by the untaxed corn, and a small sum yearly. It would be best for you to come yourself and decide the matter. I should be delighted if you would soon return to us, and still more so if you could remain until the coming Whitsuntide, for at that time we generally invite the most agreeable people of the parish. It is a rule with my wife never to invite strangers more than once a year; but *then*, Anna Stina takes a pleasure in receiving and entertaining her guests properly; and you can believe me when I tell you that every thing goes on very merrily, although I, for my part, am just as glad as the kitchen maids, when this confusion is at an end.

"The Stålkrona family generally honor the parsonage on this occasion with their presence, and I think that you could then more conveniently speak with the Lieutenant-colonel about the matter; the inspector indeed declares, that the shortest way would be to summons him before the next court of justice, yet I consider it best to settle the matter amicably. Stålkrona is not only well known as a man of unusual pride, but also as a person of whom one would not willingly make an enemy.

"Adieu, dear Sterner! buy me a pound of tobacco and be welcome with it to your old friend,
SVALLENIUS."

"P.S. I had almost forgotten (and heaven preserve me if I had)! my wife sends her kind regards to you, and begs to tell you that if you wish to retain her goodwill, on no account to fail being here by Whitsuntide evening, chiefly because she expects her brother, Mr. Trasselin, of S—aryd parish in Småland. He is recently married, and has obtained permission to come and introduce his bride to us, during this feast."

Sterner folded up the letter, and pressed it thoughtfully between his hands.

"S—aryd—hem—this name seems familiar to me, as if it were connected with some dark, sad remembrance; how can I recall it?"

After a short time, a painful "Ah!" escaped his lips. "Now I recollect; it is there, that poor, amiable Julie Von K— reposes after the trials of her short existence. Deep, fervent love, such as only glows in the heart of a child of the south, destroyed the spring of her life. How often in the silent twilight hours of evening her pale lips murmured the name Waldemar! Often she spoke to me of her past life—poor Julie! you accused yourself of having destroyed your heaven upon earth. The only relief in your sorrow were tears, and yet—oh, the mysteries of

the human heart!—it became a necessity to her to throw herself into the vortex of amusements and dissipation, but in her later sufferings even these lost their attraction for her. That unfortunate ball! After it her head bent more and more toward her mother earth, which, after she had passed through a short, but sad pilgrimage, calmly received the weary child."

Tears glistened in Sterner's eyes at the remembrance of the sad fate of the young and unhappy wife, for whose sake he had once been a wandering fugitive. All was now gone by; but he still felt his heart's blood boil, when he thought of Baron Von K——'s unworthy actions, and he sincerely prayed that they might never meet more. Sterner's noble heart had long since forgiven the bitter injury which the Baron had done him; but he was still excited at the remembrance of the despicable levity with which he had tried to throw a shade upon his wife's character.

"But I will leave these painful recollections," said Sterner as he rose; "my old and esteemed Svallenius you shall not expect me in vain on Whitsuntide evening. But beforehand I must have an interview with my post-inspector. I feel that my patience is almost at an end with his absurdities."

CHAPTER XXIII.

A SCENE FROM THE OLD ROMANTIC SCHOOL.

HEAVY, dark clouds chased each other quickly over the heavens, and in the openings which presented themselves flashed a gloomy fiery light. The storm raged furiously round the wild rocks, and its uproar was only rivaled by the unearthly piercing screech of the owls, who, frightened at the struggle of the elements, and scared by the glare of the frequent lightning, which flashed whizzing through the damp sultry air, fluttered away from their nests in the dark fir-trees to seek some more sure shelter. Violent roaring peals of thunder contributed to increase the awfulness of the scene.

On this dreadful evening sat, in a little miserable backroom, an old woman, in the corner of a ruined hearth; she was engaged in raking the coals together with a leafless branch of fir to keep alive the fire, which the gusts of wind that found their way through the decaying chimney, threatened every moment to extinguish. Now she stirred with a wooden spoon in a pot her scanty supper of oatmeal gruel; and as she was doing this she by turns devoutly read her Lord's Prayer, and smoked a little clay pipe blackened by time. Once she ventured to the window; but as the lightning flashed in her eyes, and the thunder shook the wooden dishes upon her miserable table, the old woman retreated

again as fast as her feeble limbs would allow her to the hearth, where she fancied herself safer. It had now begun to rain, with a violence which defied all her endeavors to stop up with tow and rags the gaps in the remains of the window and wall. The rain beat in every where. Trembling, the old woman at last took the gruel from the fire, and seating herself in the corner of the hearth there ate her simple meal. When this was over, she put out the fire and betook herself to the bed, to enjoy a little comfortable rest. But scarcely had the simple inhabitant of this wretched hovel safely climbed into it, and drawn the coverlet well over her ears, when she was disagreeably startled by several powerful knocks which thundered at her door. The old woman, who well knew that she possessed nothing which could excite the rapacity of those who wandered abroad at such an hour and in such weather, and that no one would think it worth while to do her an injury, set about getting out of her bed. As the knocks were renewed without mercy, and the rickety door threatened to burst open, she hastened as much as possible to light a fire again with the fir-twigs which were bound together in a crevice in the wall, then grumbling the while she shoved back the bolt.

A young gentleman, in a tasteful hunting dress, bore on one arm a fainting lady, and with the other led a horse by the reins. He was pale and looked troubled, and his clothes as well as those of the senseless girl, were dyed with blood.

"If you lead the horse under some sort of shelter, and then come and help me, you shall receive a good reward," said the stranger in a hasty manner, and bore his beautiful burden into the chamber. Some boards knocked together to represent a bedstead was all that presented itself as a place of rest. The stranger contemplated hesitatingly first the elegant delicate form enveloped in a costly modern riding habit, then the bedstead; but, as is well known, necessity has no law, the miserable straw and the tattered horse-cloth must even receive the unexpected costly jewel.

The young man bent down and examined the wound on the damsel's forehead, which was bleeding profusely. He begged the old woman, who at that moment returned, to procure a little fresh water for him, and in the mean time he tore his pocket-handkerchief into strips as bandages. At length the old woman came with a bowl of water, and the stranger bathed the temples and forehead of the fainting girl, until she came to herself and opened her eyes.

She raised herself slowly, as one awakening from a fearful dream, sat upright on her bed, and rubbed her eyes with her delicate white hand; but after she had cast a most disconsolate look around her, she began to

weep, and holding both her hands before her face, she cried—

"Alas, alas! where am I?"

"Assuredly," said the stranger, who had stood a little to one side, but now drew near again, "not where you ought to be, lady, but permit me to say, that you are not without protection. You have only to intimate whither you will be taken, and your wishes shall be attended to as soon as the storm has abated."

The girl looked attentively at the speaker. He was entirely unknown to her; but his voice was soft and pleasing. His black eyes sparkled with courage and life, the open forehead appeared as if it had never been darkened by a cloud, and the sweetly smiling lips were shaded by a little dark streak, which was destined in time to become a mustache. The stranger seemed to be about twenty years old, and his manner, as well as his whole appearance, were calculated to inspire confidence. The young girl seemed to feel this influence. After a few minutes, in which they were engaged contemplating each other, she said more tranquilly, while the color gradually returned to her cheeks—

"Doubtless, sir, I am under great obligations to you. I only remember that I was riding when the storm overtook me so suddenly; I wished to turn my horse, but, frightened by the lightning, he reared and I tried in vain to manage him. That is all that I can recollect. Perhaps you can explain to me the rest."

"I shall fulfill your wish with pleasure," answered the stranger: "but first allow me to examine your wound which still bleeds, and to bind it up."

"Good heavens, am I wounded then?" cried the young lady, greatly shocked; and she put her hand to her forehead, where she now for the first time felt some pain.

"Ah, blood, blood!" she was nearly falling again into another fainting fit.

"Do not be afraid," said the stranger soothingly; "there is not the slightest appearance of danger. I am certainly no surgeon, but I have been looking to see how it goes on."

He bathed the wound again, laid some bandages torn from his pocket-handkerchief, which he had steeped in water, over it, untied the broad silken band by which he carried his gun, and gently bound it several times round the fair girl's forehead. That he should do all this was very natural, and quite as natural it was also that she, during the performance of these services, should lean her head against his breast, so that she felt how the violent beating of his heart kept time with her own. Pure nature! At length, however, the bandaging was accomplished, and deeply blushing, and in the utmost embarrassment, she moved as far as she could from him and sighed. He also could not refrain from sighing. At last she said

with evident uneasiness in her manner and looks—

"But what shall now be done? How can I get from this place?"

"I see," answered the stranger, "that this adventure distresses you; and I am not surprised at it, but have confidence in me. You shall have not the slightest cause for annoyance, except in remaining here; for at present it is impossible to venture through the storm and rain. If you will permit me, in the mean time I will relate to you how Fate in so truly romantic a manner has thrown us together."

The damsel cheerfully nodded assent, and the stranger commenced.

"I live only a few miles from here, and am visiting a friend in the neighborhood, with whom I have been hunting. He did not feel well to-day, therefore I went out alone. When I was not far from this, I was overtaken by the fearful storm. I was about to call the dogs in and hasten home, and had just left the road through the forest for the highway, when I heard a piercing cry for help. It is true one has no robbers to fear in this neighborhood; but I knew that some notorious criminals, condemned to imprisonment for life, had escaped, and, according to report, taken refuge in our forests; so it occurred to me, that perhaps a fellow-creature's life might be in danger. I glanced at my good double-barreled gun, to see if it were well loaded, and then hastened in the direction from whence the scream came; I had scarcely gone a few steps when I beheld a horse at full gallop bounding toward me. He bore a lady who had dropped the reins, and was in momentary danger of being flung off. I hastened toward the horse, but almost at the instant I caught the reins, the accident I had feared happened. You fell from the saddle, without it being possible for me to prevent you, or to catch you. By good luck, you were more frightened than hurt. I tied the horse to a tree, and rendered you all the little services that lay in my power under such circumstances, but I found it impossible to bring you immediately to yourself. I bethought me of this miserable hut, for which I felt thankful, as it at least had the advantage of being near. I brought you here, and was so fortunate, with the aid of a little cold water, to recall you, my beautiful unknown, to yourself."

"I thank you with all my heart!" said the young lady, bashfully. "What would have become of me had it not been for your interposition? My mother, who does not live far from this, will be in the most fearful anxiety about me. Might I therefore beg you to increase the obligation we are already under to you, by accompanying me home? The storm is certainly severe, but I must face it."

"I fear this will not be so easy; but if it is your decided wish, it shall be. And as

there is no one present to introduce me, why, I must do so myself. My name is Axel Stålkrona, cornet in the — regiment of hussars. May I be so bold as to ask whom I shall have the honor of escorting?"

The young girl was about to answer, when at that instant the voices of two men were heard calling out with violence:

"Open the door, or we will break it in!"

Terrified and trembling, she hid her face in the miserable straw; but Cornet Stålkrona caught up his gun and approached the door with a decided step and a fearless countenance. Before he could reach it, however, it was burst open with such violence that the wooden bar flew far into the room, and two highly-suspicious looking fellows, dragging between them a clerical gentleman, rushed in. Although his spirit seemed to have departed from fright, yet the white flapping collar worn by divines showed his profession. A lady followed them, who at least had not lost the power of screaming. Her dripping wet mantle hung loosely over her shoulders, and as soon as she entered the hut she rushed toward the divine with the most dreadful, piteous cry, and pressed him to her bosom. The rain streamed from the dresses of the four persons who had just arrived, until it formed a little lake on the floor; and the unhappy lady in the mantle put one in mind of a maid of honor from the sea-god's court, who, borne on mountain-high waves, by some unlucky chance, had been cast on the land.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE POST-INSPECTOR MAKES NEW DISCOVERIES.

THE evening before the day fixed for Sterner's departure to Sorby and the parsonage of Wallaryd, on the same evening on which fate and the storm had brought the travelers together, whom we have left in the humble and hitherto solitary hut, Sterner visited the post-inspector's house for the first time since Constantine had appeared in the character of the heir. Although it was seven days since that event, he had not met the post-inspector nor the ladies any where.

The Major, prepared to be received by the post-inspector with cold measured politeness, was not a little surprised at his meeting him in the ante-chamber, and welcoming him with unusual cordiality. His face beaming with cheerfulness, the post-inspector shook him by the hand, and said, "Major it is my duty to admit that now and then I am too hasty: to tell the truth, I am quite ashamed of the suspicion, which I was so short-sighted as openly to avow before the young gentleman, at the miserably silly scene of last week.

"It is true that, in one matter of particular—hem!—of a considerable important nature, I was not quite without uneasiness. You understand, Major—hem!—but appearances often make things which are in themselves very natural and innocent, seem quite the contrary. Such often happens, and I am no ways disinclined to believe that it was the case this time also. In short, it was my intention, if I had not had the pleasure of seeing you this evening, to have paid you a visit to-morrow morning, and begged you to excuse and forget what has occurred; and above all things to express my hope that not a word of this vexatious affair will be mentioned to my future son-in-law."

"I accept your excuses with pleasure, Mr. Von Spalden," answered Sterner; this raises you in my estimation. One can err from mistake, it is an heirloom of the human nature; but the sensible correct this fault by acknowledging it. Your wish in regard to my silence shall with pleasure be attended to; but permit me to claim your attention in another respect, which I have much at heart."

The post-inspector led his guest into the drawing-room, and bowed politely, but with a certain expression of foreboding evil on his countenance. He offered Sterner a chair, and seated himself opposite him; opened his snuff-box, took a pinch, pocketed it again, fidgeted a little in his chair, and then said in a restless anxious voice, "I am quite at your command."

Sterner slightly coughed once or twice, quite contrary to his custom, at which a cold shudder seized the post-inspector; however, at length he began, in a clear, firm voice—"Mr. Von Spalden, when I received in Hamburg my cousin's odd and delicate commission, as well as his unlimited authority to act just as if he himself were present, this did not only comprehend what related to money-matters, for above all, he considered it of importance to obtain an honest and authentic description of the heart, the character, the intellectual powers, and other qualities, of her who, according to the testator's wishes, was to be his companion through life. When I parted with him, he particularly entreated my attention to this delicate commission. Thus, in order to fulfill his wish, I endeavored from the first to visit at your house on an intimate footing. For, according to my ideas it is only in the varied scenes of domestic life that one is capable of carrying out such observations with accuracy. My endeavors to serve my friend, as well as your daughter, in this respect, have been mistaken by you. You thought me capable of so unworthy an action as that of trying to gain your daughter's heart for myself, and thus deceiving a friend, who, with perfect confidence, had placed the happiness of his life in my hands. No, Mr. Von Spalden, I have

never yet betrayed a friend, and never will do it. To your suspicions I have only one answer, namely, that I have never endeavored to frustrate your brother's wishes, and never intend to do so. If you are contented with an honest man's promise, give me your hand, and dismiss every particle of this paltry distrust, and all shall be forgotten between us."

"In heaven's name, with all my heart, Major!" answered the post-inspector, heartily glad that the matter had been so satisfactorily arranged. "You are truly a very noble and extraordinary man; the great confidence which the heir has placed in you, shows this. To think that I could have had the slightest idea, or the most remote suspicion of this new, curious mode of allowing the abilities of one's future wife to be tried by another; for, between you and me, I must say I have always considered that such things were best investigated by one's self. But as he insists upon having it thus, of course he may. Now that I know your object, you have the *entrée* of my house at any hour of the day, and can see my daughter whenever you please; and pray let me assure you, that I do not now, nor indeed did I ever doubt your honor. Are you contented, Major?"

"Perfectly," answered Sterner; "I must further inform you, that I learn from the letters brought me by Lieutenant Constantine Sterner, that my cousin hopes to be in Helsingborg in the beginning of July, where I shall meet him. After a short tour to Sorrbý, which he will visit on his way, I shall have the pleasure of introducing him to his future relations."

"Is he coming then in real earnest in the beginning of July?" exclaimed the post-inspector, and this joyful news had the effect of smoothing the wrinkles of his otherwise fearful brow.

"If you have truly had any doubt about his coming," said the Major, smiling, "then you have questioned a thing which is as clear as day. Pardon me; but to be sincere, I must admit that I should have thought you could have judged such matters better. Could you really imagine that the heir, a spirited young man, would travel with such little pretensions? No, no, there will be somewhat more noise at his arrival, than there was when my modest Constantine drove into L—— in his little chaise. I will send forward a messenger from Sorrbý, to let you know the day and hour that he will arrive here; and although he is, as I have already stated, no lover of compliments, and is best pleased when he can escape all that sort of thing, still I think, if you will permit me to express my opinion on the subject, that it would be quite proper, and best prove your esteem and good wishes toward him, if he were welcomed on his first arrival by some rejoicings suitable to the occasion."

"Ah! my good, excellent, and respected Major Sterner, you have anticipated my very thoughts. Yes," cried the post-inspector, as though he were inspired, "I will give a *fête*, which shall be spoken of for years after in L——, an account of it shall be printed in the weekly paper, the whole neighborhood shall hear of it and be astonished."

"Heaven defend us!" exclaimed the Major, smiling, it need not be so public an affair. I fancy a little unpretending festival, to which the principal people of the town might be invited, at which dancing should form the chief amusement, would be most to his taste. However, we can speak further about this when I return in a few weeks from Sorrbý. But time presses: permit me to take leave, of your daughter."

"Pray do—certainly—with the greatest pleasure," answered the post-inspector, and politely bowed as he accompanied him to the door of Augusta's little sitting-room, where he left him, and returned to his wife, to let her for once feel the influence of his unusual good temper. It was the same evening on which the storm, before described, broke forth. The lightnings flashed zig-zag, and the heavy peals of thunder shook the windows violently. The Major was about to open the door, but drew back hesitatingly. He listened: all was quiet.

"I am curious to know," thought the Major, "if she is afraid of thunder? Does she share this common weakness of her sex, that childish fear at this grand spectacle? Perhaps it were better for me to turn back. It would cause me, I know not why, the most painful feeling, if I found that Augusta possessed a weakness—and yet this is so very excusable. But if she does, why not as well learn it now as at another time?" Having come to this conclusion, he turned the handle and entered. Augusta stood at the window, with her back turned to the door, and so deeply absorbed in her contemplations, that she did not hear the noise which the Major's entrance caused, until his cheerful, well-known voice caught her ear.

She turned round; there was a quiet earnestness in the expression of her beautiful, and more than usually pale features; but it did not escape the Major's observation, that a slight blush mingled its rosy tint with the glare which the lightning cast on her cheeks. He saw that a smile supplanted a sad, melancholy expression in her dark eyes, and gave place to more joyful feelings, as she said to him in a voice which she fancied quite indifferent, but which, according to Sterner's ideas, was just the contrary—

"It is a long time since you visited my parents, Major Sterner. Have you been away?"

"No, dear Augusta," answered Sterner; "but I have been occupied with some pressing business; this has deprived me of the

pleasure of coming here. I am astonished that you are not afraid of the thunder-storm. Here, in the north, I have never heard such fearful thunder, and ladies are seldom heroines when Thor's* chariots roll echoing above their heads, but your calm appearance agreeably disappoints my supposition, that on this occasion you might not be more courageous than others of your sex."

"Nor am I," gravely answered Augusta. "The absence of fear does not always denote courage; and, according to my idea of the meaning of this word, applied on such an occasion as this, such behavior would be called presumption. The feeling which influences me at this solemn battle of the elements approaches as little to the childish fear which seizes some, as to the equally childish, insolent daring, and contempt, which others consider it an honor to display. Man never appears to me so helpless and weak, his feebleness is never so striking, as at this moment, when he more clearly than ever must perceive, and intuitively feel, that a high and mighty Being is present, compared to whose majestic power, he, with all his pride and self-confidence, must admit his own nothingness."

With unfeigned emotion Sterner caught her hand, and said:

"With infinite pleasure I see that in this also our opinions agree. Business calls me to beautiful Sorby, which possibly, before the last autumn flowers have bent their heads in their long winter sleep, will have welcomed the lovely Augusta as its sweet mistress."

Augusta felt deeply hurt; it excited a highly painful sensation in her, that Sterner so unsparingly tore open her wound, particularly as he well knew that the slightest touch caused her irritating pain. She therefore answered quietly, but with some bitterness,

"Major, you have already too often placed before my eyes the fate which awaits me, to make a repetition of it necessary to assist my memory. You must have lost all observation, as you seem to take a pleasure in mortifying a fellow-creature for no purpose, who does not know how she has deserved that her feelings, which, from inexperience and indiscretion, have perhaps become known, should be made the object of jest. But what pains me more than all, is to be obliged to hear this from a man of whose character and disposition I had formed a better opinion. When shall we see you again, Major Sterner?"

With unexampled self-command, Sterner answered,

"I hope to be back in three weeks. I propose then to remain here until the first days of July, the period which my cousin has fixed for his arrival in Helsingborg. I shall meet him there, after which we shall both start for this together."

* Thor, one of the principal gods of the Scandinavian mythology.

"You then intend to bring him yourself to me—to us?" said Augusta, and a deadly palor overspread her face.

"It is my duty, and I shall fulfill it," answered Sterner, with firm resolution.

"Shall fulfill it," muttered Augusta, scarcely audibly, and almost unconsciously. She felt as if every drop of blood was frozen round her warm heart.

Sterner looked full into her dark eyes, where a tear in vain struggled against maiden shame, pride, and painful anger. For a moment he seemed to debate with himself, but only for a moment; he hastily took his hat and said: "Adieu! Miss Augusta; remember the words I once said to you, and believe that I shall ever watch over your happiness!" Once more he looked at her—and such a look—she could not remain in doubt as to its meaning, then hastily took his leave.

"Oh! why does he torture me thus?" sobbed the poor girl, as she gave vent to her tears. "I can not explain this feeling of horror. He leads me to the brink of the precipice, without being able to hold me back." She let her giddy head drop upon the sofa pillow.

CHAPTER XXV.

PANDORA'S BOX—THE ART OF ROASTING CHICKENS.

"WHAT do I see?" cried Cornet Stålkrona, as his eyes fell upon the person dressed in black, whom the two knights of the highway still held fast, like the wolf and the innocent lamb, or two hawks who have each clutched with his claw a dove at the same time; but when they perceive a falcon of a more noble kind, they let go their prey, and stare at him, as if they considered whether they should venture a fight with him. "Do I see aright? is not that my own early friend, the Master of Arts, Mr. Trasselin? But, you cursed rascals, what are you about?"

These words, which were addressed to the two suspicious-looking intruders, were accompanied by a slight but firm elevation of the arm, and two significant snaps of the beautiful double-barreled gun. The knaves, who had not reckoned on meeting an officer here, and directly saw by the young man's firm voice and movements that they had by no means frightened him, did not think it wise to wait for the last snap of the gun, but exclaimed unanimously:

"Do not fire, dear sir!" and escaped as fast as they could through the open door.

Stålkrona, who would not willingly shed blood, and knew he could not seize them without doing so, let them escape and locked the door, then (as he this evening seemed destined by fate to play the part of general

guardian,) set about with chivalrous courtesy to quiet and reassure the terrified travelers.

"Most certainly," said Mr. Trasselin, when he had recovered a little from his fright, "most certainly these must have been some of the culprits from the fort, against whom warrants are now out."

The lady who had shared Mr. Trasselin's fate continued unintermittingly to evince the power of her lungs, although her husband (for to this title the Master of Arts laid claim), as well as the Cornet, assured her that all danger was past. When, however, the younger lady, who until now had been endeavoring to conceal herself from observation, rose up like an apparition, and spoke cheerfully to her—

"Be comforted, my dear madam, you find here a companion in misfortune." The weeping one became more tranquil.

In her, as well as in her worthy husband, we have the honor of presenting to our readers old acquaintances from the wedding at S—aryd.* It was evident that Mrs. Sonden's prediction had been fulfilled; for Mrs. Trasselin was her daughter Louisa, of whom it was once said—"Ay, ay, how active the girl is!"

"Now, tell us, my good sir, how this adventure has befallen you," said the Cornet.

"Well, my wife and I intended to spend the Whitsuntide with my brother-in-law Mr. Svallénus in Wallaryd; therefore, yesterday morning drove from home with our own horses, for this is more agreeable and less expensive than with post-horses. As I have only a small carriage, I did not take a servant with me, particularly as I am well acquainted with the way, and am by no means a coward. I saw no difficulty in the matter, but the wicked one *did*, it seems. When we reached the wood, which is a short distance from here, we heard some men running after the carriage, and calling. 'Stop, or we'll fire!' I knew this was only an empty threat, so I drove with all my might to reach Mark's Inn. But in the whole course of my life I have never seen such legs to human bodies; quite near this the long villain caught hold of the back of the carriage, then my wife's mantle, and lastly he sprang up like a cat and seized the reins, so that the horses stood still. In the mean time, the other fellow had got up to us, and held the horses, after giving me a blow across the arm that nearly took away my senses. 'Out with all you have got,' cried the first robber who had come up to us, and who now stood at the side of the carriage. In vain I assured them that I had no money; the thunder-storm and the ungovernableness of the horses made it difficult for them to effect the plundering on the highway, so the rascals led us here, doubtless to accomplish their sinful designs in peace, which however

by the Lord's mercy, and your chivalrous bravery, were prevented. My muchesteemed Cornet, we are under the greatest obligations to you."

"This gentleman seems favored by fate in these truly chivalric adventures. He has rescued two young ladies and a clergyman by his valor, and led them into this lonely forest hut. I almost fancy, notwithstanding all my fright and the disagreeableness of our present position, that there is something exciting in this adventure. What an inexhaustible source of shuddering, terrific descriptions will it not afford, when we get home!" said the beautiful unknown, who had taken courage since the *entrée* of Mrs. Trasselin, whom she looked upon as a sort of protector.

"The pleasure of serving you was only too easily bought," warmly answered the Cornet. "I should have wished to have been able to show you that I would with pleasure have made any sacrifice for you."

"But, Trasselin," began Mrs. Louise, who had now perfectly recovered from her deplorable condition, "what if those arrant knaves have taken every thing out of the carriage? At all events go out and see if my cap-box is gone."

With the obedience of a well-schooled husband of three weeks' standing, Trasselin hastened to comply with his wife's commands; but in the carriage there was no box to be found, and with a sorrowful face he returned to her to inform her of this sad news.

"What," cried Louise, when she saw her husband coming back with empty hands; "what, Sven Erik, has my box gone? Did you not promise me when the rain began to hold it under your fur cloak? Oh, my caps, my collars, my new ribbons," said she, ringing her hands and weeping; "ah, Sven Erik, what would mamma say, if she knew how you neglect me?"

"Heaven defend me from neglecting you, my treasure! You surely mean your box; but I am not even guilty of that. Remember, dear Louise, what a blow I received at the beginning of the affair, and how I was then dragged out of the carriage; it was quite impossible for me to keep fast hold of the precious box."

"It may be so, you are not so much in fault, my poor Sven Erik; but how shall I be able to show myself at the feast of Whitsuntide when I have lost my best clothes? Dear Sven Erik, my darling, just look again. Perhaps in the confusion it has fallen out."

Trasselin, who had nothing in common with his sister, Mrs. Svallénus, except the name, but on the contrary was kindness itself, could not bear to see his Louise's trouble, so hastened once more out into the darkness and rain to rummage about with a stick. In the meantime the distressed young woman stood

* See Waldemar Klein.

in the doorway, listening with intense anxiety. Suddenly a crashing noise caught her ear. She shuddered.

"Sven Erik," said she, trembling at her own words, "I fear you have trampled the box to pieces."

"Yes, I have been so unfortunate, my angel," answered Trasselin, as he bore in a whole armfull of besmeared caps, ribbons (which once could have vied in brightness with the azure of the heavens) collars, lace, scarfs interwoven with silver flowers, and several other pieces of finery.

Louise's grief and consternation were so great, that it was only by an effort that she could stammer forth the words,

"Oh, Trasselin, why have you done this!"

She clasped her hands, and without saying another word contemplated in mute despair the shattered remains of so much expense and trouble.

"Compose yourself, dear, good Louise! I assure you I am extremely sorry; but it is as dark as pitch outside. Therefore I can not be blamed for having fallen on, and crushed in the box. Never mind, my treasure, your box is like Pandora's. Hope remains at the bottom of it, the hope, my dear Louise that when we arrive at Wallaryd all can be rewashed and put in order."

"So, so," cried Louise, who had forgotten her sorrow, in a new idea which suddenly presented itself to her mind; "you have lady acquaintances, of whom I know nothing. At least I never before heard you mention this Pandora; and as far as I can understand you seem also to have taken charge of a box for her, which no doubt was a great deal more carefully looked after than mine."

"My dear, my good little Louise," answered Trasselin, evidently much embarrassed by his wife's artless remarks; "Pandora, do you see, was a—a—in short, she was no earthly being, and wore, for aught I know, no caps. You must, therefore, perceive that—"

"I consider, that you are very simple, if you think to make me believe that you are in any way connected with a spiritual being—"

"No, my love, far be it from me, to assert such a thing. I only made use of a simile out of the mythological traditions when I spoke of Pandora's box, my angel. At some other time I will explain it all to your satisfaction—"

"So, so, you are speaking of mythology, Sven Erik; well I must admit that I know nothing about it. Mamma always said that such study was unnecessary for a simple country girl, and with the exception of Hauff and Spindler I have never read any entertaining books; but I fancy I understand something which animates and strengthens the intellects much more than such nonsense. I can teach my young companion in misfor-

tune how to roast chickens and to smoke ham and sausage," said Mrs. Trasselin, turning to the Cornet and young lady, who had been carrying on a duet of sighs and broken sentences. She sat upon the wretched bedstead, and he stood opposite her, his eyes now fixed on her beautiful blushing face, now on the dirty black floor. When she looked up, he looked down, and so on *vice versa*. They were interrupted in this interesting occupation by Mrs. Trasselin tapping the Cornet good-naturedly on the shoulder as she said gayly: "You must not be downcast, Cornet Stalkrona. With the present company's permission, I will explain my mode of roasting chickens, and submit it to their judgment. I know how to effect it without employing the stupid custom of tying the legs together. I will also show them how to smoke hams and sausages Anglo-Saxon fashion, the last without being split."

Now there are some occasions when the thoughts are soaring to higher spheres, and one hates to be interrupted, particularly by such prosaic matters as smoked ham and sausages; but curious to relate, although the Cornet and the young lady were both in the clouds, neither of them showed any dissatisfaction at Mrs. Trasselin's good-natured proposition, but on the contrary declared themselves quite willing to learn her method. The young wife was much pleased, and said to her husband—

"Sven Erik, go quickly to the carriage and bring me the basket which stands to the left of the jar of preserved pears under the seat."

Trasselin soon returned with the basket, and Louise began her arrangements as gayly as if no misfortune had happened. With Trasselin's help as much straw as could be procured was spread over the floor; the old, rickety table was placed upon it, and upon that again was laid a dazzling snow-white table-cloth. Two large sticks of fir were fixed in the hearth and lighted like a torch all the delightful things which Louise took one after another from the basket, where they lay carefully wrapped in old newspapers. The young girl was very active in helping her to arrange the dishes, Trasselin and the Cornet manufactured benches from the planks of the bed, and soon all four hungry guests sat round the unsteady table. The Cornet and his beautiful neighbor declared they had never enjoyed a more delicious repast.

"Now fetch the cherry wine," said the hostess to her husband. "I must tell you, that it is some that was used at my elder sister's wedding, therefore I hope you will relish it."

Trasselin filled two little silver-gilt cups, and presented one to the Cornet and the other to the young lady.

"But goodness, my treasure! we do not

know yet with whom we have the honor of drinking."

"My name," answered the damsel, "is Henrietta; my father, Judge Von Stolzenbeck, lived in F——, where my mother still resides. However, we have been spending a few days in this neighborhood, because mamma talks of buying Ulriksdal, which once belonged to my grandfather on my mother's side, Major Von Spalden."

"Ah, how delightful!" exclaimed the Cornet; "we shall be near neighbors. I shall empty my glass to the hope of soon seeing my wish accomplished."

Here more knocks were heard at the door, but it was easy to discern that this time respectable people demanded admittance. The old woman, who with a piece of bread and ham had crept up to her former place of refuge, was requested to step down and open the door to the new-comers. The moment the patched together wooden bar was pushed back, a young man, pale and excited, rushed into the room.

"Henrietta! oh heavens! my dear girl, are you here?"

"Ah! Constantine, forgive me all the uneasiness I have caused you," cried she, as she flew into her lover's arms.

Silent and blushing, Cornet Stålkrona bit his beautiful coral lips until they became of the deepest red, turned away his head, and stared into the flames on the hearth.

Any outbreak of feeling never lasted very long with Henrietta.

"Here, Constantine, you see my preserver, Cornet Stålkrona. Mr. Stålkrona, I have the honor of presenting to you my *future*, Lieutenant Sterner; and these are my friends and companions in misfortune, Mr. Trasselin and his wife."

With sincerity and warmth Constantine thanked Stålkrona for his kind assistance; then he painted to Henrietta his alarm when he arrived in Ulriksdal in the evening, and heard that she had not yet come back. The anxiety of her mother and aunt was beyond all description; Constantine and every male being in the establishment set forth to search for her.

"And the good star which guided me," ended he, "stood still above this dark spot."

The rest of the people, who had also returned from their fruitless search, were sent back to Ulriksdal to comfort those at home; and now quiet and cheerfulness reigned again. They ate, drank, joked, and were in capital spirits; Stålkrona alone was more a spectator than a participator. As soon as the first streaks of day appeared, the company broke up, and joyfully the old woman collected the gratuities and the remains of the splendid repast. In consequence of this eventful night she enjoyed the happiest Whitsuntide she had spent for many a long year. Henrietta and Constantine kindly

pressed Cornet Stålkrona to accompany them to Ulriksdal. Politely but firmly he declined, saying:

"Miss Von Stolzenbeck no longer requires a protector—my charge is at an end."

He called his dogs, made the party a slight bow, and soon disappeared in the dusky gray of the forest.

CHAPTER XXVI.

BIOGRAPHIES.—STORMY SIGNS IN THE HEAVEN OF LOVE.

THE most lovely morning succeeded to this gloomy night. And were it not that the majestic rising of the sun above the high tops of the forest, reflecting his rays in gorgeously bright colors on thousands of dewdrops, and on lakes and rivers, were it not a subject so frequently sung in verse and prose, I would take advantage of the opportunity to give a description of it. But fearing it might be a failure, I venture only to say that the morning was magnificent, and the air as pure as it usually is after a severe storm has cleared the atmosphere, and the rain has refreshed the grassy carpet of the earth.

Lieutenant Sterner was, it is true, no very enthusiastic admirer of such lovely natural scenery, but he could perceive its beauties. He expressed his admiration in a few words as he walked by the side of the horse Henrietta was riding—

"Dear Henrietta," said he to her, "do you not think that such a morning as this is very lovely in the country?"

"Oh yes, now and then," she answered indifferently.

"With you, my Henrietta, every moment is alike delightful, let the morning be cloudy or bright, in town or in the country; where you are, the sun of my life shines in unchangeable splendor."

"Oh, Constantine, you are only flattering," answered Henrietta smiling; "but know, that to-day I do not feel so much inclined for it. Therefore you must entertain me with a subject of a more grave nature. Let me see; you have never related to me you and your cousin, the Major's, youthful adventures. It would not be so bad, if you would thus pass away the time during our tiresome journey home."

"I fear, dear Henrietta, I shall make a wretched biographer. There is little or nothing to say about myself; for you know that properly speaking my life first began when I became acquainted with you. As to Alexander and his introduction into society, I might on the contrary call forth from my memory materials enough to make a little romance."

"Well, let us have it, I am all attention."

"In the northern part of West-Gothland,"

oegan Constantine, "our fathers lived in brotherly harmony. Besides the tie of blood, the warmest friendship united them. In their younger years they faithfully shared hardships and poverty; for the Sterner family could seldom bequeath to their descendants more than an unspotted name and their blessing as their hereditary portion; but to them honor was as an inheritance which was to be guarded with the utmost care. The unusual severity of their principles was the cause why they never availed themselves of the advantages which fortune now and then offered them, and which many others would eagerly have seized to effect their own aggrandizement. My father and uncle were the only remaining representatives of that branch of the Sterner family. They had both, when young, married good, economical wives, who were as poor as themselves.

"As an example of the strength and nobleness of their principles, and also because this occurrence had a decided influence on the outward circumstances, and the cultivation of Alexander's mind, I will relate to you an episode in my uncle's life.

"At that time there lived in the neighborhood a rich old nobleman, on his own splendid property; he had only one child. Sophie Von R—— was the idol of every one, not only on account of her beauty but of her sweet disposition, and she deserved it; for far from being vain at the homage which was offered her on all sides, she sought the glance and silent approbation of one alone, and that one was Alexander's father, then an ensign in a chasseur regiment; a handsome, well-informed youth, of simple manners, noble character, excellent heart, and extremely agreeable and clever conversation. Sophie's love for him was boundless; for an engagement he had formed in early life was unknown to her as well as to the whole neighborhood. Frequently as he visited Mr. Von R——'s house, he did not suspect the feeling he had inspired, but Sophie's love increased the more opportunity she had of becoming acquainted with him. In the mean time a person appeared who with consternation discovered the young lady's feelings toward Sterner. This was the youthful Baron Linden, who proposed for Sophie's hand, but was refused. He was not to be discouraged by this, but rather determined to find out her secret inclination; for he justly possessed enough pride to be assured that if there were not some prior attachment in the way, an offer would not have been refused, which to many other young ladies would have been most welcome.

"His penetration soon discovered the cause of Sophie's melancholy frame of mind; but with joy he perceived that there existed no tender understanding between her and Ensign Sterner. It even appeared to his eyes, which were sharpened by love, that her *penchant*

was not returned; however, he could not make out, whether Sterner were really indifferent to such manifold charms, or how much this seeming indifference might not be attributable to Sterner's well known poverty and his severe principles, which might forbid him to indulge in a feeling, that in all probability, would not receive her father's sanction. In the mean time he considered it his duty, as a friend of the family, to make Mr. Von R—— acquainted with a circumstance which was already whispered by rumor throughout the neighborhood.

"At first the father was much distressed at this unexpected intelligence; but, being free from all pride, and a friend of freedom and equality, he considered his child's happiness of the first importance, and determined to speak to Sophie about the matter. She confessed to her father the state of her heart, and declared she would never marry Baron Linden, whose noble character, warm love, and excellent position in society her father endeavored in vain to display in the best light.

"After this confession of his daughter, Mr. Von R—— determined to watch narrowly young Sterner's behavior. He seemed to like to be in Miss Von R——'s society, and paid her the utmost attention, but always in so respectful and reserved a manner that no one could determine if his heart had a share in it or not. At length, to take a decisive step in the matter, Mr. Von R—— invited Ensign Sterner one evening to a walk. What passed then was never disclosed by my uncle; but Baron Linden, who heard from the old gentleman the substance of this conversation, and Sterner's noble way of acting, never forgot it, and in a communicative hour related it to Alexander. It seems that Mr. Von R—— thought that Sterner was too bashful to express his feelings; and, well knowing his character as well as his want of means, naturally thought this might be an exception to the general rule; and, instead of waiting for a humble proposal on Sterner's side, he plainly offered him his daughter's hand, if that were in accordance with his wishes. As Ensign Sterner stared at the perplexed and confounded old man, without giving a single word in answer to this unexpected and surprising offer, he thought it might, perhaps, be his apprehension and uneasiness as to the state of Sophie's feelings which closed the young man's lips, and said with good-natured frankness:

"Be without the least concern, my dear Sterner, my daughter's heart has long belonged to you; and one must, indeed, be as shy as you are, not to have remarked it. If you, however, still doubt it, follow me."

"These words penetrated Sterner's heart; they touched chords which for him only echoed in the stillness of the night. They sank deeply into his soul. These significant words awoke him from his stupefied condi-

dion. With manly courage he struggled against the powerful feelings which threatened to burst his heart; he composed himself, and answered firmly:

"How happy might not this day have been for me, but I have no claim to the heaven which you present to my sight. Mr. Von R——, a young girl as poor as myself, but with a warm and pure heart, and to whom I am every thing in this world, possesses my vows: our union was planned by our parents when we were almost children, and became, as years rolled on, a settled thing. I entertain for her the calm friendship of a brother, and shall always do so; but no one can command the feelings of the heart. I will and can govern them, as they stand in opposition to my duty; and, let it cost me as much grief and pain as it may, I will never desert the poor girl, who would a thousand times rather die than be cast off by me. What I have told you, Mr. Von R——, is the only secret of my heart; it is the first time that I have clothed it in words, but it was due to you in return for your flattering confidence. Permit me to add, that I have known your daughter too long for my peace of mind; I now feel that I have trusted too much to my own fortitude; but my soul shall not sink under it. Farewell, Mr. Von R——! Receive my sincere thanks for all that you would have done for me! Convey my last adieu to your sweet daughter; and keep what I have confided to you in the inmost recesses of your heart. We shall never see each other again!"

"With these words he pressed Mr. Von R——'s hand, forcibly suppressed the deep sorrow which overwhelmed him, and—rushed away.

"Not long after this incident Sterner married the above-mentioned young girl. She was a happy wife; and Alexander's birth dispelled, some time after, the gloomy clouds which now and then overshadowed my uncle's brow.

"A year after their marriage, Sophie yielded to her father's and Baron Linden's earnest entreaties. She became the wife of the latter. It is true she never forgot him, who had once been the object of her brightest hopes; but the noble example which Sterner had given her had a beneficial effect upon her mind, and during her union with Linden she never had cause to repent that her once warm feelings had given place to calm regard for her good and upright husband.

"Many years had elapsed since then. Both my father and uncle had become Captains, and resided in their respective garrisons, which were not very far distant from each other. I, like Alexander, was an only child, and the warmest affection united us from our earliest youth, although Alexander was four years older than myself, and had a

more grave temper and reflecting mind. He has always exercised an influence over me, which I willingly acknowledge; for I esteem and admire him. I feel myself improved by the close connection which exists between us; and much fear, that, had I not found in him a guide and adviser, I might easily have become, through my excitable and lively character, and by the numerous thoughtless examples which present themselves in a regiment, worse than I am. But I forget to proceed with my narrative, which, if I may judge from your frequent yawning, my dear Henrietta, is not very much to your taste. However, as you yourself induced me to begin this subject, you must hear it to the end.

"Alexander's mother died when he was eleven years old. My excellent uncle, who deeply lamented his pious wife, followed her after the lapse of a year. Between him and Baron Linden there existed a friendship of many years' standing, which was based on mutual esteem; and the Baron showed that this feeling had not ceased with the death of his friend. He took the orphan boy to his own house, and there Alexander found in him and the charming Baroness, as tender parents as those he had lost. He was educated with as much care as their own son; and when the Baron died, which happened when they were both still young, he bequeathed a sum, by no means paltry, to my cousin, when he should become of age. You can easily imagine how much Alexander lamented his fatherly friend. I saw it, and was astonished at the violence of the feelings which dwelt in the depths of his soul; although outwardly he was always quiet, calm, and grave. But misfortune seldom comes alone: he had yet to sustain an equally severe loss. Young Linden and Alexander went, after the Baron's death, to Stockholm, where the former entered upon a military career; but it was a short one, for he soon fell into a consumption, and died under painfully interesting circumstances.

"Long after this distressing event, Alexander was sad and reserved, and I was the only one to whom he sometimes opened his heart. But years rolled on, and time heals all things. Alexander again entered into society, and was often one of the most *fêted* beaux in the saloons. I had then entered the army as Ensign, and Alexander was a Lieutenant in the S——schen Dragoons. We often met and were much together; for he spent a great part of the year in West-Gothland, either with my old father, or with the Baroness Linden, on her handsome property. His stay in the last named place, Alexander found by no means so agreeable as formerly. The Baroness had a scheme of bringing about a match between him and her daughter, Arabella, but two such oppo-

site elements could never be united; at least Sterner thought so. Arabella Linden was, to the highest degree, vain, fickle, and coquettish; she had always been her mother's idol, and therefore perfectly spoiled. Far from being pretty, she was only passable; but she was witty, lively, and willful to a degree; and, moreover, the richest girl in the whole neighborhood. With these advantages she had no lack of lovers, whose flattery and admiration she received as a proper tribute to her surpassing abilities. However, she never enjoyed the triumph of reckoning Alexander among the number of her admirers; on the contrary, he tried with all the fervent eloquence of a friend and brother, to draw her attention to the faults which not only she, but the Baroness also, looked upon at the most, as little artless sallies of her playful lively imagination. Alexander's endeavors failed—Arabella bent her haughty neck in a stiff bow, and assured my cousin that she never could endure pedants.

"The Baroness could not help contemplating her daughter's better qualities through the magnifying glass of maternal love, and sought to bring Sterner to the same conviction, but in vain. Thus there arose a coldness between him and his benefactress, which pained him extremely; but he could not, with truth, remove its cause.

"About this time a certain Lord-Chief-Justice Rosenbalk appeared in the neighborhood; he had received the jurisdiction of the district in which Baroness Linden's property was situated. He did not fail to make good his *entrée* into her hospitable house. Notwithstanding Mr. Rosenbalk would never see his fortieth year again, yet his lively and elegant manners made him an agreeable and welcome addition to social life. Miss Von Linden pleased him extremely, and her handsome fortune did not tend to diminish these favorable impressions. There never was any talk of love, either on his or on her side; but the *partie* seemed so suitable, that there was nothing to say against it. The Baroness alone still wished she could bring about her favorite plan; but Alexander, who considered love indispensably necessary for matrimonial bliss, and could not possibly feign love where none existed, answered respectfully, but sincerely, the hints which the Baroness threw out, half in fun and half in earnest. With growing dislike she heard him set forth the difference in his and Arabella's character, and point out that a marriage with Rosenbalk was more suitable to her disposition and mode of life. The Baroness clearly saw that Alexander was right, but this had been her dearest hope since their childhood, and she had so accustomed herself to the idea, that it evidently cost her much trouble to relinquish it. Alexander left them for the capital, and a few months afterward Miss Von Linden's

engagement to Lord-Chief-Justice Rosenbalk was announced.

"Here, my Henrietta, I must break off my narrative; for you know Alexander's adventure in Stockholm, during his last stay there. Since his return home he has visited his friends in West Gothland, and among others the Baroness Rosenbalk, whom matrimony seems to have improved. She was an agreeable and lively hostess; but as her husband was occupied at the Sessions, the visit was not a very long one.

"The delight of my parents at seeing Alexander again was beyond description. They love him as much as me, and doubtless their joy will not be greater when I go home to receive their blessing, which shall not be delayed much longer. The power of love alone has kept me longer at your side than is in conformity with my duty to them. But, besides this, my leave of absence is up, and I must return to my regiment. Then three eternal months must pass ere we shall see each other again, my beloved."

"That will be very disagreeable, my dear Constantine," answered Henrietta, rather absent, as she pressed her white little teeth together, to keep down a yawn; "but tell me if your cousin, with all his highly praised excellencies, has not at least in one respect something in common with other children of men; in a word, has he never loved?"

"I scarcely think so," answered Constantine; "his heart has been hitherto so hard that all Love's darts which have been leveled at him have rebounded, much to the annoyance of the shooters."

"Yes; because you think yourself bound to believe what it pleases him to represent to you. Do you suppose we have never heard the old story about the Baroness Von K——?"

"Pshaw, Henrietta, don't believe it," answered Constantine, indignantly; "his behavior, it strikes me, has sufficiently proved his innocency. Alexander Sterner never had the slightest idea of committing so base an action as that of which you accuse him; indeed he is quite incapable of such conduct. If you had been a man, Henrietta, and attacked my friend's honor thus, I should have defended it with something else than words."

"Dear Constantine, do not get so dreadfully excited! You pull the reins so that the horse prances. He may be, for what I care, the noblest and most amiable man that ever stepped this earth, and the centre point of every possible virtue and perfection; but for all this I would not be his wife on any account. My few, modest, thoroughly human qualities would be totally outshone, and vanish before the dazzling brightness of his celestial virtues."

Constantine laughed, and let go the reins, which he had laid hold of in his excitement.

"I think you are right," said he; "with

Major's powerful hand was laid on the lady's arm.

"Mrs. Svallenius," said Sterner seriously, "do not deprive me, by this unnecessary hastiness of temper, of the belief that you are worthy of the esteem which I have hitherto entertained for you. Let the girl off this time; she has paid dearly enough for her carelessness: and if you promise to compose yourself, and henceforth to punish as it befits the mistress of a house, quietly, and not in this unbecoming manner, I will engage in my turn to present you with another pair of much more modern and equally beautiful dishes."

Thus saying, the Major disengaged as carefully as possible Gustavine's locks from the lady's ungentle hand, and helped the poor girl, who was half dead with fear, once more to her feet. Mrs. Svallenius had by this time sufficiently recovered herself to perceive that Sterner's esteem and friendship, added to the hope of a pair of new handsome dishes, were things of too great importance to be staked against a plate of pastry. Therefore she said tolerably calmed,

"Well, Miss Stavine, you may thank the Major that you get off so easily this time. Now go and make another cake; but I advise you to watch this better while it is on the fire; I will forgive you this time."

Humbly and thankfully the girl kissed Mrs. Svallenius's hand, courtesied modestly to the Major, and hastened to accomplish her new duty.

"Now, my dear Major, are you contented?" asked Mrs. Svallenius cheerfully. "You must know when I forgive I do it thoroughly, not merely by halves, like many people."

"That is as it should be, Mrs. Svallenius, otherwise one can not call it forgiving. I rejoice that I have worked on your better feelings to-day."

The lady smiled graciously, pleaded pressing occupations, and hastened back to the bakehouse to be at Miss Björk again, for Mrs. Svallenius's pardon was of that kind that the culprit was reminded of her error for months. But our readers will think that we have had enough of preparations, and that it would be as well to come at last to the feast.

Well, a large table in the form of a horse-shoe was already laid in the dining-room. Within the folds of the snowy-white and prettily-arranged damask napkins peeped forth slices of saffron-bread, and underneath three or four other kinds of bread of a darker hue; in the middle of the table stood a very high green and white paper basket, filled with roses, tulips, and pansies, and ornamented at the sides with initials which had been ingeniously put together with forget-me-nots, a piece of handiwork which dated from the time when Stina Trasselin was at school in

Köping, and from whence, to the astonishment of her parents and brothers and sisters, she had brought home this splendid proof of her skill, which, during her maidenhood, had gained her so many dollars when she arranged wreaths for marriages and funerals.

On each side of this precious treasure rose pyramids of different kinds of well-baked pastry, which were surrounded by plated vases filled with pounded sugar, and cut crystal dishes with red preserves. At each cover stood two different kinds of glasses and a tumbler and between every two a decanter of wine, round which hung labels to indicate the contents; and lastly by each cover there lay a piece of paper with the name of the guest written on it, so that no confusion might take place on sitting down to table.

Thus was the dinner-table in Wallaryd arranged; for no one can suppose that Mrs. Svallenius was so old-fashioned as to load the table itself with viands. Oh dear no! in a far-distant corner stood Gustavine Björk in her best Sunday gown before a smaller table, which was entirely covered with dishes of glazed hams, smoked goose's breast, roast veal, roast turkeys, geese, mountain cocks, different kinds of puddings, and many other good things.

Miss Björk was arranging dishes and plates and listening attentively to Mrs. Svallenius, who stood at her side like a general surveying his field of action, issuing her orders, when the dishes were to be served up. To give the whole a distinguished air, Mrs. Svallenius had asked Westerlind, Sterner's servant, to help to wait at table, and he was now engaged in the pantry initiating Miss Anna into all the mysteries of a well-regulated table, which knowledge Westerlind had thoroughly acquired while butler in several rich houses.

At one o'clock those guests who had attended church arrived, one after the other in green and yellow carriages, and the numbers increased gradually. Now and then came some old-fashioned family coach lined with black leather, and it seemed as if it had the right of precedence to all other conveyances as they all gave place to it.

Mrs. Svallenius stood on the threshold of the door, incessantly bowing as she received every one in the most amiable manner, with an—"Ah! welcome, welcome, my dear friends; be so good as to step in."

All the ladies assembled in the drawing-room, sitting round the wall close to each other, like well-packed herrings; the sofa alone none dared to approach; there the Baroness from Sorby Park was to take her place. All were now arrived except the family from the last-named place. In order to pass away the time until the grand guests came, the gentlemen walked round the table to find out their names and seats; but when this was done, and there was no appearance

of the Lieutenant-colonel, many eloquent glances were thrown at the table on which the brandy stood.

It struck two—half-past two.

"My dear," said the pastor, "I propose that we should begin the introductory course."

"We shall wait another quarter of an hour," answered the wife in a decided tone, and Svallenius withdrew his hands discontentedly from the bottle, and stuck them again into his coat-pocket. A few minutes later the two boys came running in, exclaiming, "Mamma, papa, the coach from Sorrry Park!"

General commotion.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THEY GATHER ROUND THE TABLE.—
TOASTS.—SPEECHES.

Just as Mrs. Svallenius stepped out, a fashionable equipage approached the door. The carriage contained the different members of the Stålkrona family. In the front seat sat the Lieutenant-colonel, a man of about fifty years of age, of a tall figure, and proud pompous manner. Round his curled upper lip played a certain condescending smile, and some wrinkles on the forehead always gave him an ill-humored look. At his side sat his wife, a baroness by birth, from Småland. She valued her title extremely, not because she was in the slightest degree proud, but because it procured for her the undisputed pleasure of being thought something of, which otherwise would not have been the case, for she was stupid, narrow-minded, and tiresome. Her dress was in the fashion, but showy, and without the slightest taste. On the other seats sat the young ladies, both engaging young girls, full of life and spirits. They appeared to be the perfect opposites of their mother; their toilet was simple, but in the highest degree tasteful. On a pretty iron-gray horse, rode Cornet Axel, whose acquaintance the reader has already made. As they passed through the dining-room on the way to the drawing-room, Major Sterner was hastily introduced to the family, so that he had not time to take much notice of the ladies. When the Baroness had taken her seat on the sofa, and graciously nodded to the wife of the tax-gatherer and the hostess to come and sit by her; small glasses of liqueur and thinly cut bread-and-butter were handed round to the ladies, and the gentlemen betook themselves to the table on which the brandy stood, where good Mr. Svallenius, without the fear of being again interrupted, invited the gentlemen with priestly deportment, and rural cordiality, to cut and try the excellent cheese.

Mrs. Svallenius had whispered to Sterner in passing:—"When the gentlemen go in to

take the ladies to table, do not forget to offer the eldest Miss Stålkrona your arm."

"But how shall I know the eldest Miss Stålkrona?"

"My goodness! her in the pink dress." And with these words the minister's wife disappeared. Sterner stood leaning against the door of the Temple of the Graces, trying to find out her whose cavalier he had been appointed; but this was no easy task. Sterner was terrified at the host of pink dresses, which rustled against each other.

"It is too stupid," thought he, "that she could have given me no better sign. How can I know or guess which of these dresses has the happiness of inclosing the eldest Miss Von Stålkrona? Had our introduction been a little more regular, this unpleasantness would have been spared."

Once more his eyes wandered through the line from right to left. At length they rested near the stove; there stood a tall slender figure, which appeared to be almost buried in a cloud of pink and white gauze. Sterner only saw her profile, and the shining dark brown curls, which fell fantastically on either side of the whitest of necks. Every thing was captivating about her, and reminded him that he had seen the beautiful unknown once or twice before in church.

"That must be she!" said he to himself.

The young lady was leaning on a young man's arm, and was speaking gayly to him. As, in the hurry, the Major had not been introduced to Cornet Stålkrona, he thought she must be engaged to the young man, in which case he did not consider it proper to obey Mrs. Svallenius's commands.

The elderly gentlemen now came in. The pastor bowed to the Baroness, the Lieutenant-colonel, with his usual distortion of the upper lip, offered the hostess his arm, and, to Sterner's astonishment, he saw the elegant young man leave Miss Stålkrona and approach Mrs. Trasselin. He said a few polite words to her in the familiar manner of an intimate acquaintance, as he presented her his arm. Louise's newly starched cap, with long red ribbons and bows, waved gracefully up and down, as she bowed her head, and with a look of triumph at the ladies who were yet sitting, she laid her hand on the Cornet's arm.

There was no time for further hesitation. The Major went up to Miss Von Stålkrona.

"Will you permit me to have the honor of taking you to table?" said he, respectfully bowing. A transient blush passed over her cheeks; a half smile on her fresh lips, a slight inclination of her lovely head, and the matter was *en train*.

The others all followed them in good order, and after the usual pretty little confusion, each one was finally settled in his own place. The Major's was naturally next to his partner and as she appeared to him to be a charming

creature, he did his best to entertain her in a playful, lively, and at the same time, sensible manner.

Constantine had only spoken too truly, when he declared to his intended, that no woman whom Sterner wished to please could withstand him. The Major himself knew not that he possessed that Magnetic power of attracting young, unguarded hearts, otherwise he would not have made use of this attribute toward the young lady who sat next to him. With all due respect for himself, he had not sufficient self-love to fancy that he could in any way endanger the peace of a girl with whom he was so little acquainted. In consequence of this modest ignorance, he exerted toward Wilhelmina Von Stalkrona all that fascination which, when he pleased, so exclusively belonged to him, and which gave to the most trifling words an interest they otherwise would not have had. Their conversation was interrupted by the pastor's voice, as he, in a key or two higher than usual, pronounced these words which at a dinner-table are so full of meaning,

"Is it agreeable to the ladies and gentlemen to fill their glasses?"

The decanters of light wine quickly circulated, all was soon in order, and a proper silence ensued.

"Ladies and gentlemen," began the pastor, raising his glass in his hand, "permit me to crave your attention. In the course of the seven years which it has pleased the Lord to spare me in peace and love among my worthy parishioners, I have always had the very great pleasure of seeing you all assembled on this holy day, in my humble house; but allow me to say, that of all these happy days, none has caused me greater joy than the present; for the most earnest wish of my heart is now accomplished. In the circle which I love and honor, there stands to-day a man whom I most highly esteem—my former pupil, now my tried and faithful friend—an honest fellow-citizen, and a zealous and warm philanthropist! May all who appreciate the full meaning of these qualities join me in pledging the toast I propose—the health of Major Alexander Constantine Sterner!"

"Major! Major Sterner! I have the honor!" was exclaimed on all sides at the same time.

"I very seldom drink wine," said Miss Von Stalkrona, softly; "but to the health of him who deserves this simple, but heartfelt eulogium, I also will empty my glass with pleasure!"

When she put it down again, her eye met Sterner's, and in it she read eloquent thanks; then—Heaven knows why, I can only say that I don't know—then, a bright tear glistened in her eye.

The Major rose, and returned thanks to his host, as his tutor, the adviser of his youth-

ful years, and the friend of his manhood. These unaffected words found an echo in the hearts of his hearers; his voice, full and deep, but, at the same time, flexible and soft, sounded long in their ears, after he had ceased to speak; but it made a deeper impression on his beautiful neighbor, and produced quite a different effect. Wilhelmina had sometimes seen Sterner in church, and even from the first moment he had interested her. The earnestness and manly energy which showed itself in his noble features, as well as his whole manner and air, had made a lasting impression on her. Throughout the whole week his image had dwelt in her imagination. In longing for the return of the sabbath, her thoughts were no longer exclusively occupied by her desire to listen to the pious discourse of the worthy minister; other feelings influenced her young heart. Feelings, which till now had slumbered, were roused in her bosom, strong and powerful, for they were new to her.

Brought up in great solitude, almost without any other society except that of her parents and brother and sister the young inexperienced girl fancied she perceived in Sterner's conversation, so full of soul, and in his agreeable manner, the reflection of her own tender sentiments; and, without herself being aware of its existence, she sucked in the poison, which a growing love at each moment presented to her. Poor child! she little knew the misery Mrs. Svallenius's feast would cause her! When the healths of the Lieutenant-colonel and his Baroness, Mr. Trasselin and his wife, and the other guests who had claim to this honor, had been drunk, they rose from table.

After coffee, the company distributed itself in small groups in the garden. The Major was standing by Miss Von Stalkrona, admiring one of Mrs. Svallenius's flower-beds, when Cornet Axel joined them, and expressed his pleasure at making the Major's acquaintance, as he was no doubt a relation of Lieutenant Sterner.

"Yes," answered the Major, "he is my cousin; I did not know that you were acquainted with each other."

"Nor is our acquaintance of very long standing; it dates only from a few days' back, and originated in rather an odd way."

"Well, and how was it, if I might ask?" said the Major.

The Cornet related his adventure, and the Major was seized with a disagreeable sensation as he heard Stalkrona relate with warm eloquence, his and Henrietta's situation in the lonely chamber, and her joy on recovering from the fainting fit; then pausing in his account, he began to tell of his acquaintance with Mr. Trasselin and his young wife. It did not escape Sterner's notice, that the warmth with which the Cornet spoke had embarrassed him, and that he had doubtless

kept secret many circumstances. Now, as Sterner had no confidence in Henrietta's constancy, particularly when she was put to the test, he thanked Fate for, perhaps, affording him an opportunity, through this adventure, of opening his friend's eyes to the character of his intended bride, while there was yet time to draw back.

"Any how," thought Sterner, "I must go there: Ulriksdal is not very far from this. I do not know how it happens, but a presentiment tells me, that this accident will not be without some result. At least, I will see and convince myself; perhaps I have deceived myself."

During the Major's silent meditations, young Axel stood gloomily staring thoughtfully, or thoughtlessly (it was difficult to decide which), at Mrs. Svallenius's blooming beans. Throughout the rest of the walk Sterner enlivened the broken conversation by introducing subjects of a less dangerous nature.

CHAPTER XXIX.

DISPUTE AND RECONCILIATION.—SINGING.—
DANGEROUS CONTEMPLATIONS.

It was tolerably late in the evening when the pastor beckoned Sterner away from Miss Wilhelmina, with whom he had just finished a waltz; for the younger members of the company had assembled in the paved courtyard, hard as it was, where they amused themselves with different kinds of dances. Two sprightly young country boys formed their orchestra, and fiddled away most unmercifully in fearful monotony, upon two broken violins, displaying their skill with such force, that they made the hair of the more musical guests stand on end by their powerful exertions.

"What is it you wish, my friend?" asked the Major.

"The Lieutenant-colonel is sitting in my room, where we have placed the card-tables—would you not like to take this opportunity of speaking with him about the mill-dams?"

"Certainly an attempt can do no harm," said Sterner, as he followed the pastor into his room.

The Colonel was extended upon a sofa, enveloped in a cloud of tobacco-smoke.

"Well, sir," said he, as Sterner entered, in a tone of fashionable indifference, without rising, "What have you to say to me? I can almost guess; but, my young friend, will it not be best for us to let the matter rest until the proprietor of the property himself arrives?"

Sterner was a man who never allowed his reason to be influenced by anger; he certainly felt offended by the Colonel's behavior, but his voice was calm, although not

without a degree of pride, as he answered—

"Whatever I may decide on in this matter, will be quite as binding as if it had been my cousin's own act. Perhaps you will permit me to remark, that I have had an estimate prepared of the damage caused by the inundation to the fields, and the other pieces of ground; however, we can drop the subject for this evening, if you wish it."

"Well, if this long-settled affair must needs become again a subject of discussion, let me hear what you intend to do with the estimate?"

"As far as I know," continued Sterner, "there exists no document which declares that the agreement which you might have made with the former proprietor should be valid with his successor. Thus the matter can by no means be considered settled; on the contrary, it remains to be seen if the old contract shall be allowed to subsist or not. Thus you must perceive that it is the duty of the proprietor (if he has no particular desire to see his property destroyed) to have recourse to the law, in case the affair can not be settled amicably. If you do not feel inclined to enter into any treaty of this kind, the question can rest as it is until we both have an opportunity of discussing it fully before a court of law."

"Major Sterner," answered the Lieutenant-colonel, drawing himself up to his full length, "I, on my side, must take the liberty of informing you, that in this place, where I have passed many years, I have always been accustomed to see that respect paid to my years and position to which I consider I have a right. It must, therefore, greatly astonish me and my good neighbors, if a young man, a stranger, a—a—in short, a poor dismissed lieutenant, should bring my name, the honored name of the family Stalkrona, before the law in a matter of such a pitiful nature."

At the mere idea of so unheard of a disgrace the Colonel trembled in every limb with violent rage, and was obliged to sit down again in order to breathe freely.

Sterner maintained perfect command over himself. There was not the slightest emotion to be observed in his features or voice, as he coldly replied—

"Your words do not offend me, for what is ridiculous seldom excites that feeling; but, as you are not inclined at present to come to a proper understanding in the matter, things must remain as they are until a future occasion."

Sterner was about to leave the room, when the Colonel said with suppressed passion—

"Do not be so hasty, Major Sterner. You must know that I have all my life hated lawsuits more than the plague, therefore it vexed me that you should speak of such a

thing to me. In my heat a word may have escaped me which was improper. Excuse it, sir, and let me hear your proposition."

"With great pleasure," answered Sterner, returning to his place. "According to the estimate drawn up, the damage caused to the meadows, pasture-ground and orchard, is rated at a little more per annum than five hundred—"

"The devil, sir! are you mad?" interrupted the Colonel, starting up again; "of what are you thinking? Do you suppose Sorrbý Park could raise that sum? You must know that my property is an insignificant piece of ground, which my father, about forty years ago, bought from the person who at that time possessed Sorrbý Park. It consisted then only of the park and some unimportant pasturage, together with the privilege of using the mill: it was afterward enlarged. If, however, the compensation is proved to coincide with your calculation, I must just give up every thing; for the whole mill-dam brings in nothing more."

The Lieutenant-colonel's proud bearing and the tone of his voice were so subdued when he spoke of such a possibility, that, to make use of the modern expressions of musicians, it changed from an *allegro maestoso* to an *andante lamentabile e doloroso*.

Sterner could no longer retain the cold manner which the Colonel's indifference and incivility had called forth. It had never been the Major's intention to make any alteration in the old contract, and from what Svallenius had told him, he was too well acquainted with the Colonel's haughty and impolite conduct to allow it to ruffle his temper; therefore he only wished to humble him a little, and show him what might be the consequences when the new proprietor took possession of Sorrbý. The Colonel's altered manner moved his heart. He well understood how much it must have cost the proud man to lower himself thus, therefore Sterner spoke with his natural kindness.

"There is not the slightest need to drive the matter so far. You must perceive, Colonel, that it was your own extraordinary behavior which obliged me to remind you how far things might be carried, if we did not treat this subject with that moderation which becomes neighbors, and above all, men of the world and of education, if they do not wish to see a slight difference turned from a mole-hill into a mountain."

Luckily the Colonel perceived the force of these remarks, and being taught by experience that his rank and name did not make the impression on Sterner which he had expected, he determined to try another course.

"Very right, Major," said he, with as obliging a smile as it was possible for him to put on after such violent agitation; "I thank you for pointing this out to me; and to con-

vince you how willing I am to enter into an amicable and forbearing negotiation about the matter, may I beg of you to partake of our family dinner at Sorrbý Park on Friday next, when we can talk over the question undisturbed."

"My time is so fully occupied by business and traveling backward and forward, that I fear there is little possibility of my being able to accept your kind invitation; it will give me great pleasure, however, to show you that in every thing that regards our little difference, no one loves fairness more than I, for my friend's sake, if it be also observed on the other side."

Sterner declined the invitation because he feared the Colonel might fancy he had been so yielding in the hope of obtaining an *entrée* into his house. The Colonel, on the contrary, considered nothing so insulting as indifference in this respect. Invitations were never very frequent to the Stålkrona's house; but to refuse one was something so irritating to the Colonel's pride, that he determined rather to make another attempt than to let his opponent obtain that importance and consequence which, according to his opinion, he would gain when it became known that he had refused an invitation given by the Colonel himself. In a tone and manner as if life and death depended on it, he said—

"Major, if you do not wish deliberately and most deeply to offend me, recall your refusal. Be my guest on whatever day it is convenient to you, and thus confirm the neighborly concord which I offer you."

As Sterner had not the slightest idea of the true cause which urged the Colonel thus to press him, he at length gave way, not to annoy him. Had he suspected the true motive doubtless he would not have done so. The gentlemen separated with the most friendly understanding. The Colonel took his seat at the card-table, where his presence had been long expected, and the Major betook himself into the saloon, where Miss Von Stålkrona and Cornet Axel were preparing to sing Frithiof's banishment. As he entered, the whole company were standing in a half-circle round this group, with the exception of the elderly ladies, who sat near the Baroness, and respectfully listened to her discourses on her favorite theme, namely, breeding poultry, and the most judicious method of feeding them.

"My friends," began the Baroness, "this is my favorite occupation; but my girls have not the slightest taste for it. They do not love these little sublime creatures as I do; but they are very young. Aurora, that little hair-brained thing, is otherwise an angel of goodness; Wilhelmina is more serious. Yes, my dear ladies, that is my most agreeable occupation. When I hear the quack—quack—quack of my poultry, I feel so delighted, so happy, I almost fancy I under-

stand the little creature's innocent sports. But, talking of poultry, there can be nothing so barbarous as the means some people employ in fattening turkeys. I should have thought it incredible had I not seen it with my own eyes. They stuff large balls of dough down the turkey's throat, and force it to swallow them. When crammed full, it goes about quite melancholy, and no wonder, for the poor animal naturally suffers from indigestion, notwithstanding that these creatures have astonishingly strong digestive powers. If I wished to fatten a turkey well . . . but, hush! the dear children have begun their sweet song. Pardon me; but as long as they sing, I can not talk, I must defer my description to another time."

Sterner had approached the circle of young people. Miss Wilhelmina sang with taste and correctness. Her voice was weak, but it possessed much natural flexibility and purity. It reminded Sterner of Augusta's delightful soul-inspiring tones. What was the finest singing to him, after he had heard hers? Was there ever a voice so flexible, so rich, so sweet, so pure? Sterner answered all these questions with a—"No."

If Wilhelmina Stålkrona could have guessed where his thoughts were roaming, as he leaned against the window with his arms crossed, lost in meditation, she would have blushed at her interpretation of his behavior and attitude, which appeared to testify visions of the most tender nature. When the song was at an end, and Sterner did not follow the example of the others who gathered round her, with their praises and compliments, begging her for another song, "because this had been so beautiful—so very beautiful!" Miss Minna's delusive presentiments became something more than mere creations of imagination; they became almost certainty. What else could this silence well be, but the unconquerable bashfulness, which she knew from the few novels she had toiled through in Sorby Park, to be a sign of the first awakened feelings, which—Wilhelmina scarcely dared to admit what it was called; but she sighed and thought: "I value this silence a great deal more than the noisy approbation of the others. They only admire those whom they see and hear last. For my part, I would not care to excite any other attention if I only knew that this extraordinary man, who awakens my whole interest, valued my slight talent."

Naturally Wilhelmina had no other wish, and if she had, she could not yet discern it.

After supper, those who lived near went home; however, the Stålkrona family remained all night; and as Sterner remembered that he had not yet thanked Miss Wilhelmina for her song, he did so now that they were almost alone, in a manner which not only evinced his delicate feeling; but also his good judgment.

The next morning they all assembled in the garden; they breakfasted, attended church, and examined the tombstones together. Lively and agreeable, and only too dangerous for the sentimental Wilhelmina, was Sterner's conversation, as he, with captivating eloquence, expressed his thoughts and feelings on the various subjects which presented themselves to their notice during their walk—namely, about nature, religion, life, death, and eternity. Wilhelmina had a good natural understanding, and much good feeling. Thus she experienced a double enjoyment when she heard what had been so often the subject of her own enthusiastic meditations, discussed in such a manner. But when she had returned to her quiet home, she experienced other sensations, which were strong enough to give quite a new direction to her usual occupations and thoughts. After this Whitsuntide feast at Wallaryd, she felt that a passion, before unknown, burned in her heart, the silent development of which disclosed to her a world of rich and sacred feelings, which she however hid, as the miser does his treasure, from every one, even from her sister, from whom till now she had never had a secret. She felt herself happy only, when, shunning all observation, she plunged deep into the solitude of the dark, melancholy walks with which Sorby Park so plentifully abounded.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE SEEDS OF DISCORD SPRING UP AND BEAR FRUIT.

WE bring events back again to Ulrikedal, where Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck was engaged forming and rejecting plans of repairs, and in making calculations of expenses, without coming to any happy result; but as calculations and miscalculations are daily at our command, without our having to look for them in novels, we will now leave this worthy lady, and take a glance at her daughter Henrietta, and the state of her heart.

Henrietta was, on the whole, nothing more nor less than a wild, joyous, little thing; neither nature nor reflection having given her character the strength and firmness which, perhaps, does not so seldom distinguish her sex, as is generally supposed. Every thing that had a touch of the romantic in it attracted her. The adventure of that never-to-be-forgotten night had, moreover, awakened a feeling in her which had slumbered till now, as an opportunity had been wanting to bring it forth—namely, an earnest longing for something new, for a change. It is true this feeling was still quite undefined; but that it existed there is no doubt, for she could not refrain from making Axel Stålkrona, and their first meeting, a subject of conversation during

her return home in the morning with Constantine. She felt something like the desire which our first mother experienced toward the tree of knowledge. Therefore she was out of humor, therefore Constantine was to tell her stories, and therefore she found them tiresome, as she did Constantine himself, and all the world. She asked herself the question, why she was so silent; but she could not assign any satisfactory reason. However, she did at last find a reason, which in her eyes was perfectly adequate, namely, that she did not choose to exert herself. More was indeed not necessary.

When Henrietta, on her return home, retired to her own room and took off her bonnet before the glass, along with the loosened ringlets, down fell the green band which Axel Stålkrona had bound round her forehead. She picked it up quickly, held it in her hand, and with looks beaming with joy, contemplated the little blood-spots.

"Ah," she exclaimed in childish delight, "I shall keep it! how I shall treasure it! I will work a new one for him. Oh, you handsome, proud Axel!" she exclaimed, enchanted at the idea; "with what delight shall I not present you with this slight token of my gratitude!" But then Modesty and Discretion whispered, "Will it be proper?"—"And why not?" answered thoughtless Self-confidence; "it will be nothing but a miserable reward for all the trouble and uneasiness which I caused him."—"But," replied Reason, "perhaps it would be right to hear Constantine's opinion about it."

She began seriously to reflect, and pondered on these questions longer than she had ever thought on any one subject in the course of her life; for she did not like thinking. At last she determined to follow the dictates of Reason, and flew down to the court-yard, with the band in her hand, where Constantine was amusing himself playing at ninepins.

"See, see!" cried she, running up to him, waving the green ribbon over her head. "Cornet Stålkrona took this off his gun, and bound it round my forehead to stop the blood. Is not this Stålkrona very good and amiable? Do you not think, my Constantine, that I should make him a new one, as this is quite spoiled?"

"No, dear Henrietta, I do not think so," answered he in a tone which made the thermometer of her heart fall at least ten degrees.

"Then it is very strange of you," replied she. "I can't really see why I may not do what I myself consider right, and I believe I have some little judgment in such matters."

"I do not doubt it," said Constantine, "but if that's the case, why submit the matter to my decision? However, I cherish the hope—is it too much to expect?—that my intended little wife will never do any thing but

what is in accordance with the wishes and feelings of him who is to be her guide for the future."

"But, Constantine," cried Henrietta with unfeigned astonishment, "what a speech to make! I think the Major has quite bewitched you with his preposterous views. Do you suppose, then, that I did not know what was and was not proper before I became acquainted with you?"

"Very possibly, dear Henrietta; but do you see, the matter is just thus: that a young lady engaged to be married can not do every thing just as she pleases."

"So—oh! Then you disapprove of my being a little thankful to this noble young man, without whose succor you would now have been deprived of the pleasure of practicing your eloquence and your talent as adviser upon your much too patient *fiancée*!"

"I value Stålkrona's action according to its desert; I myself, or any other man, would have done the same; but what was the cause of your requiring his help and protection? Was it not your obstinacy? as, notwithstanding my entreaties and remonstrances, you *would* ride out alone, I being unluckily prevented from accompanying you. But with regard to your last expression about my good advice, you must excuse me if I remind you that my simple remarks were intended more as a decided request than as advice, with which request, if you love me, you will comply."

Henrietta burst into tears. This was too much, she thought, and, moreover, was entirely unexpected,

"Cruel Constantine," sobbed she, "why have you allowed yourself to be so metamorphosed by your cousin, you, who a hundred times before his journey, declared that you would never have another wish than mine? And now, that I wish to take my own way for the first time, you speak to me like a Mussulman to his favorite slave, and not at all as if you were my slave, which you have, doubtless in jest, so often called yourself."

"My dear Henrietta," said Constantine, wiping the tears from her blooming cheeks; "and I am so still in real earnest, if you will be but good and reasonable. You are mistaken if you fancy that Alexander has had any thing to do in forming those views which I have just expressed. Recollect the last seven months that we have been engaged we have not been together. Scarcely three weeks after that happy day, I undertook the journey to Hamburg, and it is now only eight days since I have returned to you. You must perceive that we have not yet had an opportunity of trying our characters, way of thinking, principles and feelings, and as this is decidedly necessary, I have not hesitated on this occasion to declare mine openly to you. You may now, in conform-

ity with your own female delicacy and reason, act as you think fit."

As far as this, Constantine was right. They knew, indeed, nothing more of each other than what they had incessantly said and written to each other, namely, that they loved each other indescribably, boundlessly, and unutterably, and other similar significant scribbling of the same sort; but on what their love was grounded, or even if it required any other foundation than that of fleeting inclination, had never been the subject of their meditation.

Constantine's interview with Alexander Sterner in L—— was not without influence. Notwithstanding the free and thoughtless principles which he had expressed on that occasion, more out of gayety of temper than real conviction, he determined, as he had often done before, to imitate the Major, and to take his reasonable principles as a model for his own. It was in consequence of these new good intentions that on the road he resolved, at the first opportunity, to obtain a more accurate knowledge of Henrietta's character. The wished-for opportunity had now arrived. If the Major had been invisible, and could have looked down upon Constantine and seen how he behaved himself in this entirely new character, had seen his quiet and dignified manner, he would with difficulty have restrained himself from laughing with all his heart. It had quite a different effect on Henrietta, but did not produce the one intended. She answered nothing; but, giving him a look, which according to her opinion, was enough to annihilate her bold lover, she hastened to her own room, where she kissed the mischief-making band with true enthusiasm, weeping torrents of tears, as she kept repeating to herself that Axel Stalkrona would never have acted thus.

"But," said she aloud, as she arose, "Constantine shall learn that I am no child, to be forced into obedience by fear. This day, this very hour, I will begin to work the band, and, moreover, he shall not get a kind look, a kind word from me as long as we remain here."

"But if he should go away?" asked Aunt Elizabeth, who had entered the room unobserved, and overheard Henrietta's intentions.

"Then he may go, dear aunt. He will come back again, I am sure."

"But if he should never return, my child, what then?"

"I can't tell now, aunt; but I fancy I should be able to survive such a fearful event."

"Fie! how you speak, Henrietta!" added the well-meaning aunt, who although she overlooked her niece's whims, disapproved of her frivolity in matters of importance, "I do not know what is the question, but this I know, that anger and dissension, after

being united only seven days, are bad signs for the happiness of a lifetime, and do not agree with the ardent desire with which you longed for the return of the handsome young man. I must give you a little piece of advice, to which I hope you will not turn a deaf ear. She who wishes to be a happy wife should try to gain the esteem of her future husband, and never before marriage, much less as a wife, allow her actions to be guided by obstinacy."

"I am not obstinate, aunt, but I will do what pleases me. This does not denote obstinacy, but rather strength and firmness of character."

"You are a child, a spoiled, pampered child, who must sooner or later pay dearly for your experience—I tell you so. You had better set about improving yourself."

With these words the aunt left the room.

"Improve myself!" laughed Henrietta, scornfully. "Have I any thing to regret?—But *that* Constantine!"

Again tears were shed over her lover's altered opinions.

CHAPTER XXXI.

VISIT OF RECONCILIATION AND CONVERSION.

A FEW days after the feast, Major Sterner rode through the long, somewhat decayed avenues which led to Ulriksdal. Here and there, on both sides, little grottos appeared between the trees, and half broken-down wooden benches, which seemed to tell of the favorite play-haunts which the youth of the place had in former and happier days possessed here: they were now desolate, trampled down, and covered with moss of many years' growth, with sticks and weeds; they formed a sad contrast to the fresh green of the neighboring trees. The picture of Life and Death, hand in hand! As the mansion was situated at the end of a valley, before which hills covered with trees rose like a bulwark, Sterner could not perceive it in the distance; but sitting on one of the above-mentioned little benches, which seemed to have been lately mended, he discovered a female figure in an attitude of thought with her head supported by her hand.

"What do I see!" exclaimed Sterner, springing from his saddle. "Is that not my amiable little cousin herself who thus conjures up the time of yore, when the wanderer was surprised in particular hallowed fountains and grottos by those enchanting beings; who although of divine descent, appeared at times in the regions where they reigned to the eyes of astonished mortals?"

"Ah, is it you, Major Sterner!" said Henrietta, advancing a few steps to meet him. "You can say very pretty things to ladies, I hear; and yet, when it comes to the point, you will not admit that there is

any thing good about my sex. I have great reason to be angry with you, and am so with all my heart, notwithstanding the flattering simile which it has pleased you to make, and which otherwise would be, for an impromptu, very witty."

"Well, this is what I call an open declaration of war," replied Sterner, laughing. "In heaven's name let me hear how I have had the misfortune of falling into disgrace, for when we last separated I was so presumptuous as to fancy that I stood somewhat high in my beautiful cousin's favor."

"With great satisfaction," said Henrietta, "I must declare to you, that notwithstanding all your knowledge of mankind you were mistaken this time. High in my favor! and you could really imagine it? Did you fancy you deserved it when you could prefer some sporting dogs and an old dried-up bookworm to my invitation to remain? No, no, good Major, you must not fancy that!"

"It was, to be sure, rather mortifying for you," replied the Major, with a scarcely perceptible smile, "since you were always accustomed to blind obedience from your admirers; but as I have not the happiness of counting myself among their number, I could never have entertained the presumptuous thought that Henrietta would attach importance to my refusal or promise; or that fulfilling a duty (for such I assure you it was) would be punished by the displeasure of a young lady who possessed such a good disposition as I thought Henrietta did."

"My goodness!" said Henrietta, reddening with anger, "rather speak your biting sarcasms plainly out than clothe them in this perverse tone of polished courtesy. A pretty school for Constantine! Indeed I am no longer astonished at him, for it is easy to perceive where he has imbibed his altered feelings. He has very much changed, and not altogether for the better, since he had the inestimable happiness of being under his cousin's immediate care during his stay in Hamburg!"

"Ha! ha! ha! So Constantine has committed some fault, and I also. Might I be bold enough to ask in what our guilt consists? But now I reflect upon the matter, I can not be a party to any private quarrel between you. Will you not place sufficient confidence in me to make me umpire in this matter?"

"Most willingly, if you will only be just; but how can I expect that from you when I have every cause to believe that you set the boundaries of a woman's wishes and actions in the narrow circle between the work-table and—the kitchen?"

"You are mistaken, Miss Von Stolzenbeck," answered Sterner, speaking for the first time seriously to his beautiful neighbor. "Indeed you are very much mistaken, and have, I know not how, formed quite an incor-

rect idea of my way of thinking. No one can value an educated woman higher, and admit her rights more thoroughly, than I do. Nature bestowed on her as well as on man a free will; but according to the force of circumstances her sphere must be different; the man's more extended, the woman's more confined. The bold, fiery soul of the former knows no other bounds to his activity than those which impossibility have planted for him. The delicate, true feeling which nature has placed in women, sufficiently points out the limits to their desires and actions, without making a more exact definition necessary. Soft, good, and modest, they never think of a boundary line, if even there existed one; for these very qualities prevent their wishes and actions from being in opposition to those of their husbands. I say 'the educated women,' for I suppose that she always possesses those qualities which I have mentioned. Exceptions there are of course in this, as in the opposite case. If she has the advantage of a careful and cultivated education, so much the better; if not, she has still my esteem, if she only possess those qualities which I value most highly of all—goodness of heart and purity."

Henrietta looked at the trees, heavens, and earth, and wished that this tiresome sermon would come to an end. When Sterner was silent and contemplated her with a look that was not unlike pity, she was about to get up and go.

"Not yet," said he; "I have just disclosed to you the true thoughts of my heart; will you not keep your promise, Henrietta, and not cherish a distrust for me, which I assure you is entirely unmerited?"

"Possibly it is unmerited! for with the conception of a woman you seem to unite that of an angel. You will have to seek far, Major, if you wish to find a woman whose will is never in opposition to that of her husband. Oh, how glorious, how elevated! Good—soft—modest—delicate true feeling—purity of heart, and goodness-knows what all! I think that we can possess these qualities, as far as is permitted to a mortal, and still our will may be in opposition to that of our husband's. No, it is not worth while to lay my case before so severe a judge."

"Only try, dear Henrietta. Perhaps we shall understand each other better then."

"Ah well, it is all one! I will hear the decision of your wisdom—*nota bene*, without subjecting myself to it." She then sincerely related the whole dispute, and what led to it.

"That is just what I imagined," thought Sterner, and really felt some uneasiness for his friend's future happiness. Stålkrona's warm glances, while describing Henrietta, again passed before him, foreboding evil. "If Henrietta has felt the influence of these passionate glances," thought he, "Constantine's

open opposition in a matter of such unimportance would increase this feeling, for it has properly neither shape nor name, but it might gain one, just because she regarded the matter as the expression of a natural gratitude."

By unnecessary provocation these feelings might easily become warmer. With Henrietta's gay and childish disposition the matter might soon have been laughed off, and made up by preparing the band, had not Constantine so unseasonably tried his new method, and employed an earnestness and dignity, which must have been as surprising from him as they were strange and repulsive to Henrietta, and which, any how, was not at all called for on this occasion.

All this Sterner perceived in a moment; but it was difficult and critical to express himself in this affair. He disapproved of Constantine's proceeding; but it would not have been wise if he had blamed the future husband, and placed his assumed dignity in a ridiculous light to his intended, which would possibly have been the consequence, in case he had simply declared that Constantine was wrong. Henrietta would have had reason to doubt in other cases the judgment of her intended; and of all things, Sterner did not wish to rouse a feeling which, in his estimation, was the most pernicious a woman could foster, because it lowered her husband in her estimation. With Henrietta it would have been particularly dangerous, because she did not possess in her own strength of mind a guide for her actions.

"Well, what do you say to it, Major!" asked Henrietta, impatiently; for, from his silence, she came to the conclusion he would come over to her side.

"I say," gravely answered the Major, "that it surprises me greatly, that such a trifle should cause several days' disagreement between persons whose greatest delight it should be to divine and anticipate their mutual wishes. It is difficult, or rather impossible, to judge what is right or wrong in the actions of others. I can only advise that each party, without exactly admitting any fault, should perceive that the little circumstance in question requires a yielding temper. I will leave it to your own discretion to determine if you have not given importance to a matter which, in itself, possesses none; for it is just possible that Stalkrona would not set that value on the present which it deserves. Perhaps it might even excite his surprise to be thus reminded of an event, which would have claimed the assistance of the most humble being, just as much as that of Cornet Stalkrona; in short, what if he numbers this among the thousand trifling adventures which occur in a man's life?"

"No, Major Sterner," said Henrietta, drawing herself up proudly, "this recollec-

tion does not belong to the multitude of other unimportant events, and will assuredly not be looked back upon as a 'trifling adventure' by him, as it pleases you to affirm. I know and feel this with perfect certainty." At these words her cheeks glowed with a deeper red, and she fixed her eyes fearlessly upon Sterner, who seemed to wish to penetrate the hidden recesses of her soul. An uncomfortable certainty of what he had feared now arose in the Major's mind; but he was not the man to allow himself to be embarrassed. He answered with great indifference:

"If it is so, you know more than I do; for on Whitsuntide day, Stalkrona related the incident to me in a manner in which I could not imagine that he attached any particular importance to it. And, allow me also to remark to you, that the Cornet would probably be more astonished than flattered, if it came to his ears, that this ambiguous honor happens to be the apple of contention between a young girl and her intended."

Oh, what a speech for poor Henrietta's vanity to digest! She thought she should almost sink into the earth from anger and shame.

"What, Stalkrona expressed himself so! And the Major—the man must be made of ice," thought Henrietta; "they are both of them abominable—he and the Cornet; but now, I thank God that I have not carried out my hasty determination."

Sterner remarked her emotion, and her train of thoughts. "If I might offer Henrietta some advice," said he, "it would be, to give Constantine immediately her hand, in token of reconciliation, and to be more cautious in future."

She was silent for some moments.

"I believe," she began, "that you mean it well, Major Sterner, although I must frankly tell you, that no man has hitherto taken the liberty of speaking in this strain to me; however, I will try to follow your advice as well as I can. Let us hasten to Constantine!"

"Now, that pleases me," said the Major, as he kissed Henrietta's hand. "Believe me, a true friend never flatters, however kind may be his meaning. Of one thing more may I venture to remind you, that a young lady who has given away her heart, is no longer so independent as she was when it was free."

"That is truly very sad," sighed Henrietta, fastening her bonnet ribbon, and arranging her veil.

"Oh, don't think so," said the Major; "remember the words of Scripture: 'Charity suffereth long, and is kind; it beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.' And charity here means love."

"Oh, in Heaven's name, spare me," cried Henrietta. "I have heard more than enough of that kind of thing." And, as she smil-

ingly took his arm and set out homeward, she added, "In Major Sterner an eloquent pulpit orator has been lost. Might I be so bold as to ask, why we do not find cousin Alexander in the place which Nature seems to have assigned to him?"

"Possibly," answered the Major, "because my heart would have broken if I had seen how my beautiful young auditors, the lovely buds of the vineyard, looked smilingly upon the butterflies which fluttered so boldly and harmfully around them; while, on the contrary, they hung down their heads, and looked faded and fatigued, when the well-meaning minister would refresh and improve them by some drops out of the sacred well-spring of life."

Henrietta asked no more questions, and both hastened their steps. Not far from the house they met Constantine, who came running toward Alexander with an exclamation of delight, and as soon as he had somewhat recovered from his surprise, cried—

"Now, Henrietta, we shall have a sure and impartial arbitrator—I almost fancy you have confessed to the Major already."

"I willingly admit that cousin Alexander possesses all the requisite qualities for a confessor; but, however, you are wrong to make use of this expression; I only complained of you; and while he held forth a sermon whose extraordinary merit will most possibly be lost to the world, since I was the only auditor, and I must confess, a rather impatient and sleepy one; I, nevertheless, in the magnanimity of my soul, resolved to forgive you, but only on condition that you never permit him to hold like discourse to you."

"I swear it; but what do you intend further?"

"Well, I intend to consecrate with my own hands this mischief-making band to the flames, and henceforth to think no more of Cornet Stalkrona or his heroic act. Are you now contented?"

"Perfectly, my dearest Henrietta!"

Peace was once more restored, but the angel of Concord having once flown away, could never again, as in past days, spread out his protecting wings over Constantine and Henrietta.

The evening passed in idle and tiresome conversation, in which Mrs. Stolzenbeck took the lead, yawning at least twenty times; the Major skimmed the pages of a newspaper which by chance lay there, while the good lady explained to him the very sad changes which had taken place in this neighborhood since her youth. She found the society particularly limited. There were so few fashionable people that she, who was accustomed to live in educated circles, could not possibly think of burying herself and her Henrietta in this desolate grave.

At length, the longed-for hour of supper arrived, and as it had been arranged to set

off early the following morning, they separated at no late hour. It was only when in their common room, and the friends had an opportunity of opening their hearts undisturbed, that their real meeting may be said to have begun. Sterner told Constantine of his conversation with Henrietta, drew his attention to the error he had committed, and gave him good advice for the future, without creating the slightest suspicion in his mind about Axel Stalkrona.

The first rays of the sun still found the friends absorbed in their various communications, they then recollected that a few hours rest would not be amiss; and after breakfast the Major started for Sorrbý, and Constantine accompanied his future relations to F—.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A DISAGREEABLE ADVENTURE.

On the confines of the Schonen frontier, which borders on Sud Smaland, one travels through a long, unusually dark, gloomy forest. At the end of this the eye discovers at a considerable distance the high white walls of the lovely Sorrbý, surrounded by smiling meadows and groups of trees. A river winds through the valley which bounds the property on the east, and on the other side is seen a house painted yellow, in the midst of a beautiful wild park. This is the home of the Stalkrona family, the charming little Sorrbý Park. Three well-graveled pathways branch out from the large square farm which belongs to the great Sorrbý, round which grow hedges of white and purple lilacs and rose bushes, interspersed with tall birch trees. The path on the right led to the shrubbery, the luxuriant nature of which a foreign gardener and Mrs. Svallenius were trying to improve. The middle road went straight to the dwelling-house, and the one to the left led to a little gate, from which it branched off and wound through the valley, until it came to a pretty wooden bridge, painted green, which joined Sorrbý to Sorrbý Park. The night was already far advanced, when the Major's panting horse stopped before the grand entrance. It was bolted and barred, for the few servants who were in the big house did not expect so late a visit from their master. Sterner knocked at the door several times with the handle of his whip; but it made only a shrill echo without producing the desired effect.

"Confound it," murmured Sterner, "I suppose I must keep watch here the whole night."

All further attempts to arouse the servants from their sweet slumbers were fruitless, and Sterner swore the very next morning to have a bell placed there, which might awaken

the Seven Sleepers themselves; but as this was not yet there, he bethought himself of some other way to get in. It struck him that there was a narrow footpath which ran into the road from the valley up to the little gate. He determined to wend his way thither, in the hope that his voice and knocking might better be heard there, as this part was quite near to where the servants' apartments lay. He turned his horse and found the footpath without much difficulty, which, after various windings through the valley, brought him to the little road that led from Sorby Park up to the dwelling-house. As he was turning toward the bridge he cast a glance across it, and thought he observed a white figure moving in the shade of the thick trees. He reined in his horse, looked with his keen, practiced eyes in the direction where the figure appeared, and listened attentively. The night was indescribably beautiful; the thick, bushy trees stood in the first luxuriant enamel of summer; the clear moonlight gave to their high tops a faint silvery light, making the shades under the dark vaults of foliage still deeper. The alders waved over either side of the river, and appeared to behold with silent delight how their leaves, sparkling in the fresh evening dew, were reflected again in the clear waters below. Fancying himself misled by an optical delusion, proceeding possibly from the white, oddly formed trunks of the birch trees, Sterner was just about to continue his ride, when he distinctly saw a white figure move toward the foot of another tree.

"Why should I not examine what that is?" thought he, turning his horse toward the bridge; but, arrived there, the horse stood still, began to prance, and would not go over. This convinced Sterner the more that it was no sport of his imagination: he bound the horse to a tree, and stepped over the bridge into the park. He had not gone far, when to his astonishment he perceived that the figure in white was sitting on a stone near a tree; but on his approach it rose and disappeared as quickly as lightning amidst the dark masses of shade.

"Who is there?" cried he; no answer was returned.

"Can this be a vision?" thought he, "I must be bewitched if I don't unvail the apparition!"

He hastened in the direction whither he fancied the form had fled, and soon perceived it again at the distance of about twenty yards. It stood leaning against a tree, and waved the hand, as if to motion him to withdraw, and to take another course.

"Your most obedient servant," murmured the Major. "That does not take place until we have become a little better acquainted;" so saying, he recommenced his chase of the white figure; but it flew with the rapidity of the wind along the different curves of the

winding walks, evidently showing a wish to mislead its pursuer. But his curiosity only increasing, for a time he followed closely; he had, however, nearly lost his patience, and given up the hope of capturing the swift-footed being, when, exhausted from the exertion, it at length sank down upon the turf at the side of the walk, again motioning to Sterner to withdraw. He felt irritated, and exclaimed:

"No; you shall not have made a fool of me, and led me on thus to no purpose."

He now reached the mysterious thing, and was about to lay hold of it in no very gentle manner, when with a great effort it raised itself half up, and cried in a feeble, trembling voice, which seemed familiar to Sterner:

"In Heaven's name, be you who you may, have pity on me and go! Do not touch me—I can not defend myself!—My strength is gone."

"By heavens!" cried Sterner, "do my senses deceive me, or is it Miss Von Stalkrona whom I have had the misfortune to frighten and offend in this manner?"

"Sterner! heaven be thanked!—I thought —"

The softly whispered words now ceased entirely, and he to whom they were addressed trembled with fear lest the poor girl might faint from exhaustion and fright. He repented of having so unnecessarily become the hero of an adventure, which might have such bad consequences, and swore a solemn oath, if he only got well through this, never again to follow white figures, even though they appeared in his own chamber.

"How do you feel now?" asked he sympathizingly; "I trust your health will not suffer from this disagreeable incident."

Wilhelmina did not answer. She had sunk upon the ground, damp as it was from the night dew. In the greatest anxiety Sterner bent over her.

"Oh that she would only not faint!" he murmured to himself.

"Miss Wilhelmina! say but one word—how are you?"

But Minna was silent, and only some slight breathing showed that her heart still beat; but she was as cold as ice, and senseless.

"So, here's a pretty thing," said the Major, as he passed his hand over her forehead and cheeks, and found his unfortunate suspicions confirmed.

"What in heaven's name is to be done now? Where can I turn to in the middle of the night? I can neither take her to my house, nor to her own. Cursed curiosity! what shall I do?"

During these silent meditations he had thrown off his cloak, and spread it on the grass. He contemplated the graceful, beautiful creature, who lay before him, with pity. "She must not remain lying there, she will

take cold," said he at last, as he gently lifted her up, and placed her on the mantle, which he wrapped round her as carefully as a mother would her tender infant. He then seated himself upon the trunk of a tree, which had been thrown down, leant the head of the senseless girl against his breast, warmed her with his breath, and carefully rubbed her temples and pulse with a pocket-handkerchief dipped in the wet grass.

"If Augusta could see me now in her dreams," thought Sterner, "a painful feeling might be roused in her mind; but she would also read in my heart, feel its quiet beating, and be convinced, that if it beats quicker than usual, it is only caused by pity and uneasiness as to what may be the consequences of this adventure to this young and delicate being."

Sterner pursued his endeavors to bring Wilhelmina to herself. At length she woke out of her cold sleep; a deep, long sigh escaped her firmly closed lips. She felt that her head rested against Sterner's chest, and that his arm encircled her. She heard him whisper—

"Awake! oh, awake, Wilhelmina! Say only one word!"

She would so willingly have done what he wished, the state of affairs stood clear and open before her soul; but a long while elapsed before she was capable of speaking. Too many warring feelings assailed her at once.

"Many thanks for your kind sympathy, Major Sterner," at last she whispered, trying to rise.

"The Lord be praised that I hear you speak again!" said Sterner with heartfelt joy, as he rose from his seat on the trunk of the tree, and sat down near her. "I am in despair at having brought you into this condition. You will never forgive me, and much less can I ever pardon myself."

"Do not speak of forgiveness; there is no cause for that," said she, in a soft and hollow voice, as if it were a spectre speaking from the depths of the grave. "You could not possibly expect to find me here at this hour, and I can offer no excuse for this deviation from general rules. But there is something in me that I can not bind down to time and place. I love these solitary wanderings in the gloom of the night, where, undisturbed by any one, I alone seem to live; but from this hour they shall cease. Will you listen to a request which my situation renders necessary?"

"Say your commands; and if it is in my power to fulfill them, you know beforehand my answer."

"Then swear to me on your honor to relate this occurrence to no one—no, not to your dearest friend, even though you should hear that bad consequences have arisen from it. Do you promise this, Major?"

"Yes, Miss Von Stalkrona, I swear by my honor, and the esteem which I have always entertained for you, never in the slightest to hint at this incident. May it not have a bad effect upon your health? For I should then have to blame myself as the unfortunate cause."

"Do not distress yourself, think nothing of it," said Wilhelmina, in a sadly melancholy tone. "Even though I should die, I would not complain! Would you not shed a few tears to my memory? And you will never break your word, will you? Now, Major Sterner, let us go! My strength is equal to it."

Sterner took her hand. It had just been icy cold; now it glowed in feverish heat. He pressed it with emotion; silently they proceeded through the dark paths, and Wilhelmina, who was well acquainted with every step, struck into a little by-path, which soon brought them to the bridge. Sterner, fearing she might swoon again on her way home from exhaustion, and suspecting from her feverish appearance, that she was seriously unwell, earnestly begged for permission to accompany her home, but she firmly refused.

"Our path separates here. Fear not for me," said she, with a parting wave of the hand, and disappeared.

Sterner went slowly over the bridge. "Poor thing!" sighed he; "I fear—but I may be mistaken."

He sprang upon his impatient horse, and speedily galloped along the road, at the termination of which he stood at the little gate. After several loud knocks, accompanied by—

"Holla! you within there, open the door!" Westerlind, half asleep, at length made his appearance at an open window, looked out, and yawned the question if that was his master.

"Yes! yes! It is I, indeed; don't you hear, you lubber! Open the door directly! I require rest!"

"What the deuce possesses him to go thus wandering about in the middle of the night, and disturbing people in their sleep!" grumbled Westerlind, as he descended the steps.

Immediately after the large front door creaked on its hinges, then the little gate, and finally Sterner enjoyed the longed-for delight of reposing in a large four-posted bed, where he soon forgot his present difficulties in sweet dreams.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

IMPORTANT REFLECTIONS.

CONSIGNING our hero to the repose which he so much required, we will now pay a hasty visit to L—, in order that we may not entirely lose sight of our friends there. Many and various were the plans which the

post-inspector formed respecting the all-important point, namely, the suitable reception of his future son-in-law. Five or six times a day he marched between his own and the Burgomaster's house (for he had resumed his intimacy with him) with the air of a man who bore the weight of the whole world upon his shoulders. They often laid their heads together over a game of draughts; and more than twenty suitable propositions had sprung from the Burgomaster's old brains; but were always stifled the moment of their birth by a "No, that will not do, my worthy friend!" from the post-inspector. It fared the same with all the plans which Mr. Von Spalden proposed. As soon as the Burgomaster heard them he shook his head compassionately and said—

"Ay, ay, my friend, it is easy to perceive that you have neither that taste, tact, nor experience with which people of rank manage such matters. I assure you, on my honor, that not one of your propositions is worth any thing; if nothing I have advanced can be adopted, it were better to lay the matter aside altogether; for nothing can come of these eternal objections."

"I beg your pardon! Nothing come of it?" replied the post-inspector, smiling scornfully. "But I can tell you my good sir, that something *will* come of it, and perhaps just something of which Burgomaster and council have never yet seen the like."

Mr. Von Spalden angrily took his hat, for he now considered himself too important a personage to be treated with such insolent familiarity.

"Always so passionate," said the Burgomaster, smiling. "Have I not told you more than a hundred times that a man of the world never allows himself to be excited, is never irritated, and above all, never gives the reins to his rising passion. Otherwise one can do nothing, particularly when one has something rational to consider."

"That may be true," said the post-inspector, somewhat calmer; "but the Lord be thanked, I never wish to be considered a man of the world;—but that has nothing to do with our subject; the question is, how shall we come to some determination? It has just struck me, that we might consult with our women folk; in such matters they are often as wise as we men, although it does appear strange. If, therefore, my dear friend, you will be so good as to learn what your wife's opinion is, I will go home, and, for the first time during the twenty years we have been married, consult with Mrs. Von Spalden."

"Bless my soul! what a husband! jokingly exclaimed the Burgomaster. "My dear friend, you treat your wife like an Indian chief, but not like a Christian husband, who never declines his wife's intelligent judgment, but, on the contrary, willingly listens to her opinion in matters of far greater importance

than the one we have before us. However, I rejoice at your happy thought, and I wish it all success!"

Somewhat embarrassed, the post-inspector shook his old friend's hand, and betook himself home to hold the momentous consultation.

Mrs. Von Spalden, with her sleeves turned up, and a napkin about her head, was engaged kneading wheat-dough as her lord and husband entered, and said, in an unusually kind manner—

"Rigitza, my dear, let that alone, and come into my room; I have something to say to you."

"To me, William! You really must wait till I have finished this dough; or else it will ferment over the trough."

"No I will not wait a moment. Why have you servants, if not for such occupations; and why have I a wife, if she is not to be at my command when it pleases me to speak to her?"

"But my dear Von Spalden, I should not like to let any one else make the wheat-dough. You know I have always done it myself; women can not be ready at any minute to leave their occupations. I will do my best to hasten."

"You shall come this very minute, I tell you. Where is Augusta? The young lady is not yet too fine to help her mother?"

"Poor Augusta!—she has headache, and pain in the chest, and is so unwell that she can not leave her bed, the poor child!" sighed Mrs. Von Spalden.

"Nonsense!" cried the post-inspector, in his old domineering manner. "She shall instantly leave her bed and come here!"

"But, my dear, that is impossible. You know that Doctor Harding has prescribed a blister between her shoulders. Therefore she can not possibly assist me in this occupation."

"And if she had a hundred blisters on," exclaimed the enraged man, "every thing must give way to my orders."

"Do you mean the blisters, husband?" asked Mrs. Von Spalden, with a scarcely perceptible smile, notwithstanding her great respect for her dear better half.

"Well," said the post-inspector, ashamed, "I mean, which you perfectly understood, that the girl should obey, and if she came, why so must the blister also. But no more unnecessary babbling, Rigitza; come now, and leave that alone."

Mrs. Von Spalden dared not make any further objections, so prepared, although unwillingly, to follow him.

"Now," said the post-inspector, when they had reached his *sanctum sanctorum*, i. e. his own room, whither no one dared intrude. "Now you are to rack your brains if you have any. Think in what way we can best receive our son-in-law." (The post-inspector

hated long sentences and unnecessary words, he therefore generally omitted the word future or intended when he spoke of his son-in-law to be.) "You see, Rigitza, I should like, that it should be something brilliant and tasteful, but, above all, something as out of the common way as possible."

"My goodness!" cried the wife, clasping her mealy hands together, so that out of fear for his new trousers the post-inspector stepped back, "how can you expect that I should all at once be able to suggest something, when I have not yet given it a thought? No, it is quite impossible; you must at least give me till this evening to consider."

"Impossible, quite impossible!" said the post-inspector. "This is the first time I have ever honored you by asking your advice, therefore I desire you to tell me this very minute what your genius prompts."

Mrs. Von Spalden, accustomed to humility and obedience, was silent and reflected a moment.

"Perhaps," began she in an uncertain voice, "an illumination were—"

"You goose!" exclaimed the post-inspector; "although I want something unusual, is that to say that it is to be something ridiculous. Have you ever heard of illuminations in the middle of summer?"

"Why not, husband? It might be done in the house, and the necessary shade might be produced by trees."

"By trees, inside of the house!" laughed Mr. Von Spalden. "Do you imagine the question is to make Christmas-trees for little children, adorned with *bombons*, raisins, &c.?"

"But let me finish what I was saying, my dear," added Mrs. Von Spalden; "I don't think my plan so bad a one. According to my opinion, that interminably long dark passage, which runs through the whole house, will be of great use to us. This is my plan, that we procure a quantity of tall branches, out of which we can form an *allée*. Each branch should be illuminated, and in the background might appear all sorts of decorations, as, for instance, something transparent, with his initials and suitable emblems and inscriptions. Then, when accompanied by you, he enters, let the music (which might easily consist of the four musicians of the town) strike up in the distance, for there is plenty of space behind. From thence he is led into the drawing-room, where he will find a brilliant ball, which he will open with Augusta. Then follows the supper, at which you will propose his health with a flourish: which, as we can not procure trumpets, must be done by clarionets. What do you say to this, William?"

"Well, well! that is not so foolish; but I fancy transparencies are too common. In the mean time I will take your plan into consideration, and think of improvements wherever I find it necessary. To turn the passage into an *allée* would not be so bad!"

Delighted at her husband's approbation, Mrs. Von Spalden hastened away to finish her employment.

When it was ended she laid some warm meal-cakes upon a plate, arranged a little tea-tray, and went with it into Augusta's room.

"How are you now, my dear child?" she asked the pale, suffering girl, with tender solicitude.

"Oh, mamma, I feel better this evening, and should be still better if you would come and sit by me, and talk with me a while."

With kind care Mrs. Von Spalden placed a small table by the side of Augusta's bed, set the tea-things on it, then took a chair, seated herself opposite her, and related to her the previous scene with her husband and its results.

"Was it papa who first proposed these preparations?" asked Augusta. "I can not imagine what can be the use of them."

"Well, you have to thank the Major for it, for he alone was the cause."

"Stern, dear mamma? then he must have given some reason for it. What did he say to papa about the matter?"

"He proposed to Von Spalden to give a little *soirée* in our house on the evening of their arrival, to which the leading people of the town should be invited, without any further festivities; but you are aware when your father once gets a scheme into his head that interests him he never knows where to stop. I suspected that something of this sort was the cause of that eternal running to the Burgomaster."

"Well, the festivities are not so bad," said Augusta, "if they are not made ridiculous. The idea of the ball pleases me."

"Does it please you, my child?" said the mother, who was prepared for a thousand objections. "I rejoice to hear that you again take pleasure in amusements suitable to your age."

"Ah! my dear mamma," said Augusta, smiling through her tears, "I was thinking of something else. It is not the pleasure which makes me pleased with it. I perceive that it is a delicate attention of Stern's to free me from the painful restraint which I should naturally feel, were I to receive, almost alone, the two men to whom I am bound, the one by love, the other by circumstances. I certainly owe Stern my thanks for thus wishing to soften the horrors of the first moments of this most unpleasant meeting. And this is why your plan is welcome to me."

"Well, as this is settled, my Augusta, and the first people of the town are to be invited, you must show yourself off to the best advantage. If you like I will send for the first dressmaker, so that you may consult with her about the most suitable toilet for this occasion. I will also send some one to

the Burgomaster's wife to beg her to lend us the last number of the fashion-book."

"On no account do so, dear mamma! I want neither the one nor the other; I will never dress according to the book of fashion."

"But, my dear Augusta, if you do not wear the dress, the silk for which your papa gave you yesterday evening, and which was intended for this occasion, you will incur his displeasure, and that had better be avoided."

"In this I shall certainly not be disobedient, good mamma. I will willingly wear the silk, although it is much too handsome for me, only I must be allowed to see about its cutting out and making-up myself. All will be right with respect to the toilet: heaven grant that every thing else may be as well!"

"Yes, you will see, Augusta, all will end well, if you will let things take their course. Such a good and obedient daughter as you have always been may hope for God's blessing."

Then the mamma nodded her head consolingly and lovingly, and taking up her large bunch of keys, she descended into the store-room, there undisturbed to consider what quantity of eggs, butter, veal, and vegetables it was necessary to order from the country.

Not only the heads of the post-inspector and his wife were a little turned on this momentous occasion, but those of the good people of L——, in proof of which we may record the following little conversation which took place at a small tea-party at Goldsmith Hjertberg's, the post-inspector's former neighbor. It was the day after Whitsuntide. The society consisting of the first mechanics of the town and a few shop-keepers with their wives, were all assembled round the coffee-table in the room which, though let to the Major, was during his absence made use of by the family to receive their friends in on holidays and festivities.

"Ay, what changes there are in this world!" said tanner Blom's elderly wife. "It is not very long ago since that miserable hovel there, which joins the back court, served the haughty post-inspector, Von Spalden, for a dwelling-house. He did not then hold his head as high as now. If you meet him in the street he looks at you as if you were the dust under his feet, instead of being respectable honest people. And I very well remember how the little Miss herself, who is soon to be a fine lady, did not think it beneath her to come to me in the twilight with a six stiver piece in one hand and a little pewter can in the other, to buy half a quart of milk. You must know, my friends, that the worthy family could then not even keep one maid-servant. Well, well! as times change so do the manners. I don't doubt she will have forgotten all that now!"

"No, mamma, I don't think so," replied

a little girl about twelve years of age; "at least she has not forgotten us; for, as I have already told you, mamma, when I met her to-day on the way to church, the moment she saw me she stopped, although she was walking with the stately gentleman who lives here. 'Excuse me, Major,' said she 'little Mademoiselle Blom was one of my acquaintances at the time when we were neighbors. How is your mamma? Remember me kindly to her, and if you ever want any patterns, my little Charlotte, come to me; you know you are always welcome.'"

"That was very kind and grateful," cried many voices.

"Only what was due," said others.

"Mere artful talk without sense or meaning," declared the remainder.

But now the young wife of a baker raised her voice above those of the others.

"*A propos*, my dear friends," she began, with an air of importance, "I suppose you have not heard tell of the great *auto-da-fê* which the post-inspector, Von Spalden, intends to give on the occasion of the arrival of his future rich son-in-law, which will take place in the beginning of next July?"

"What sort of a thing? What is he going to give?" exclaimed the women full of curiosity, all at once.

"I suppose you mean a *fête*, my dear?" said the baker, who was considered a learned man.

"It is all one to me," replied the wife angrily; "but I should think I must know what I say and assert. *Auto-da-fê* and *fête* is quite the same, I say, only the former with this exception that it is somewhat more solemn, and is enlivened by some wax-light illuminations."

"Yes; but you see there is a great difference—"

"What nonsense!" said his wife, interrupting him, "I will tell you where there is a *real* difference between a husband who understands politeness and manners and one who makes as many remarks on his wife as a pendulum in a clock makes ticks."

This capital joke could not fail to bring forth great applause. The whole party laughed to their heart's content, then drew their chairs round the baker's talkative young wife, who gayly described all the ins and outs of this important subject which she had been able to gather, working up with much skill so astonishing and ingenious a combination that the whole appeared like a fairy tale.

All L—— talked over this matter, although in a different way. The coming momentous July was the subject of conversation in all societies, at every dinner, at every tea-table. The heir, Augusta Von Spalden, her romantic luck, and the post-inspector's splendid *fête*, occupied, in a word, every one. But we will now leave the good inhabitants of L—— and betake ourselves again to Sorrbý.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

DISAGREEABLE NEWS.—WESTERLIND'S OBSERVATIONS.

WHEN Sterner awoke the following morning, his adventure of the night appeared to him like an extraordinary dream. One after the other each separate particular unfolded itself to his mind. Words, tones of the voice, the exact spot where he had found the young lady, became more and more distinct, till at length the whole stood before him in that vivid clearness, which sometimes appears when memory has been sharpened by repose.

He was not quite at ease, at the thought of what might not arise from the promise of silence which Miss Von Stålkrona had received from him. A mutual secret of this kind would have been of no consequence, had it concerned an elderly lady, who wished to avoid the remarks which might be made, were it known that it was her principal pleasure to take walks in the night; but with a young, handsome, tender, and possibly sentimental and romantic girl, the matter wore quite another face. Sterner could not conceal from himself that he had made some impression on Wilhelmina, but from what he drew this conclusion was by no means so clear to his mind; and yet he was quite certain of it; a disagreeable foreboding told him that he had not deceived himself. To sport with the affections of a young innocent heart, was something hateful to a man so noble, so free from all paltry vanity; but to heal the wound which unrequited love would make in the poor girl's heart, was a delicate and painful task; and if she hoped for mutual love, Sterner saw how necessary it was that she should be made aware of her mistake.

When Sterner had got thus far in his meditations, Westerlind cautiously opened the bedroom door, and was just going to retire again, when Sterner coughed to let him know that he might enter.

"Are you awake, sir?" asked Westerlind, bowing with his usual humility. "This is the fourth time I have been up here. But you retired so late to rest, sir."

"What o'clock is it then? I have indeed slept long."

"It is a quarter past one, sir."

"This must be the first time you have been here, for I have been awake more than an hour."

"I was kept a short while at the inspector's while a servant from Sorrbý Park was inquiring if any body here wanted any thing done in town for them; it is an old custom that we tell each other when a messenger is dispatched from either of the two properties."

"Has the family from Sorrbý Park sent a messenger to C——?" asked Sterner with certain uneasy misgivings.

"Yes, sir, an express was to start in a few minutes—and while the Cornet was

writing to Dr. Sommer about the matter, the lad hastened here. Perhaps you wish something ordered from town, sir; but I fear it is too late now."

"Of what matter are you speaking, Westerlind? You are rather unintelligible when you have any news to tell," said Sterner, exercising all the self-command he was capable of. And truly he never listened with more anxiety than he did then for the words which were to proceed from his servant's lips.

"I speak of Miss Wilhelmina's sudden illness, which set the whole house in an uproar. It happened in the following manner;—but you can't endure gossip, sir. I only heard it from the servant, and if he tells a falsehood, so do I. Perhaps it only annoys you, sir?"

"Not at all, Westerlind; the account of an illness is not gossip. Let me hear."

Westerlind, who easily perceived that the subject interested the Major, coughed several times to try his master's patience to the utmost. When he fancied that he would not be interrupted in what he was saying by the usual, "Enough, be brief," &c., he put on an air of importance, and at length began.

"Miss Wilhelmina, because she will not stay like her sister in her mamma's bedroom, sleeps alone in one of the rooms in the gable-end—it is just that one there, you can see it here, sir, from this window;—well, this morning she did not descend as usual to breakfast. They waited more than an hour for her in vain, then first the maid and afterward Miss Nora herself went up and knocked at the door, for it was locked, but they got no answer. They knocked again—still silence; suddenly they heard loud talking inside, and they recognized Miss Wilhelmina's voice, as she several times exclaimed.

"Do not be alarmed!—no, pray on no account alarm yourself!—it was my own fault, my own imprudence!" She then began to weep bitterly, and to exclaim passionately, 'What will he now think? I have betrayed you, poor heart!—I would a thousand times rather die than outlive such humiliation!' and much more in a like strain, which I understand as little as the rest. Miss Nora flew down-stairs to the Cornet perfectly terrified; he broke open the door, and there lay Miss Mina, in a burning fever, raving wildly. The moment she beheld her brother she became quite outrageous, and cried repeatedly, 'Oh! do not follow me so!' and then in a soft, miserable tone—'Be merciful! go your way; I can no longer defend myself!' and much more to this effect."

"But, Westerlind," asked Sterner, who with difficulty had retained his outward calmness, "how do you know all this; the lad from Sorrbý Park could not have related all this?"

"No; if you will not be angry, sir, I will be sincere. The inspector's daughter Lisette is something between a companion and a lady's-maid in Sorby Park; as she is always glad to take a run home, she went instead of the lad; but no one is to know any thing of it. She told all this to me and her mother, and every word is the truth; for she was with Miss Nora from the very first moment till the time when she escaped to give her mother the information. The young lady is universally beloved, therefore the consternation is equally great among the servants as in the family."

Sternier felt himself bathed in a cold perspiration. "How soon can the doctor arrive?" asked he.

"Not before to-morrow morning early, even though he travels all night."

As Westerlind fancied there was nothing more to be said on this matter, he took the liberty of changing the subject of conversation himself, and begun with the unassuming question, "Do you like the room, sir, and the rest of the arrangements? I have endeavored to have every thing arranged according to your taste and usual custom."

"It is very true, Westerlind," answered Sternier, who had only half caught his servant's words.

"Perhaps I had better bring your coffee up now, sir?"

"I am quite satisfied, Westerlind; every thing is very prettily and agreeably arranged. You are an attentive and clever fellow," said Sternier, who, lost in his own meditations, fancied that he was still talking of the room.

"Hem!" thought Westerlind, "I rather fancy his mind is beginning to wander also." After a few seconds he boldly asked, "Are you not well, sir?"

"Am I not well? Are you mad?—how can you ask such a question?" said Sternier, waking out of his dreams and looking sharply at his servant.

"Heaven forbid! I meant nothing wrong; I thought you might be unwell, sir, for you answered me so oddly, when in all humility I asked if I should bring up the coffee."

"Indeed, Westerlind! but let me advise you not to take upon yourself to draw conclusions; I am perfectly well, and was only thinking of other matters. The sooner you bring me the coffee the better; then order my horse to be saddled."

"Cursed mishap!" exclaimed the Major, as soon as he was alone. "Should she die, and I had it on my conscience that I hunted her to death like a deer! How many extraordinary and unexpected events happen during the course of one's short journey from the cradle to the grave! When my evil star appears, it is always in the form of a young girl."

"Arabella Linden drove me from a home, which genuine kindness and love had offered

to me in her father's house; and her jealousy and pride blotted out my image from her mother's heart. I then sought in the great world some compensation for the peace which was denied me in the simple domestic circle, and what did I gain by so doing? Was I not the unfortunate cause of the lovely Julie Von K——'s breaking a blood-vessel, for which, I may say, I was forced into exile? And now, when I am thinking of happiness and joy alone, to have frightened the life out of a young girl, for which I shall, perhaps, lose all my earthly comfort and peace of mind; for if Mina Von Stalkrona dies from the effects of last night's adventure—tranquillity can never return to my soul. But even should she not die, what will be the consequence of this unfortunate love, which now is too evident to me? I have never willingly," said Sternier, laying his hand upon his heart, as if to strengthen his words, "given her cause to suspect the existence of a tender feeling toward her. I saw her sometimes in church before I came here. We sat opposite each other, and I have now a sort of faint recollection, that every time I happened to cast my eyes on her she blushed. At Mrs. Svalenius's request I offered her my arm when we were going to dinner; she naturally fancied it was my own act. I was unusually cheerful that day; we spoke on many subjects, for I found that she had taste and feeling; but the easily deceived and inexperienced girl must have given another meaning to all that I expressed, merely from the pleasure I felt in agreeable society."

"I can not imagine," added he, after deep meditation, "when I review what passed during the days we spent in Wallaryd and the event of last night, how, with the slightest reflection, she could misunderstand my behavior; but, unfortunately, a young, inexperienced girl is not capable of reflecting when that passion is first roused in her heart. Poor Wilhelmina! I can only sincerely pity you!"

Westerlind had returned during this long soliloquy, and had offered his master coffee three times, without his having remarked him, for there he sat in dead silence, his arms crossed, staring fixedly before him. "All is not right," thought Westerlind. "I should not be surprised if he had fallen in love with Miss Mina. Any how, he has been as though he were bewitched ever since I told him of her illness. It were good fun to enlighten one's self on the matter; there can be no harm."

"Major Sternier, another messenger has come from Sorby Park."

"What! how is it there?" said Sternier, springing up in such engerness that he upset the waiter on which Westerlind was handing him the coffee, and all its contents fell to the ground.

"Yes, yes! I am right," thought the sly Westerlind, as, while gathering together the broken pieces of china, he reflected on some suitable story, for he well knew that his master would inquire of no one else but himself.

"Well, what news did the messenger bring? Let that trash alone, and get up," exclaimed Sterner, impatiently.

"Well, sir," answered Westerlind—and the firmness of his voice showed that this was not the first time he had told a falsehood—"her ladyship sent to ask if the Inspector had any leeches by him. The young lady is, doubtless, in the same state. Would you like to have some more coffee, sir?"

"Yes, and to the deuce with you; I have had none yet."

"No, that is very true," said Westerlind, and away he hastened for fresh coffee. It was, in due time, brought and drunk.

"The horse is saddled, sir," said Westerlind.

"Then let it be unsaddled immediately. I shall put off my ride to another time. In the mean time you can let the dogs have a run round the park. Look well after them. Hector is fond of biting the one I bought last. Take particular care of little Semiramis, and break her in without a collar, as I have been accustomed to do. Bring those books here, which are in the large trunk; and also my flute and portfolio. So you can go, until four o'clock in the afternoon."

Westerlind hastened down stairs, inwardly rejoicing that he should now have sufficient time, comfortably, to inform Mrs. Blidberg, the Inspector's wife, of his important discovery.

The Major sought in vain every means to lend wings to the time; slowly and dully it glided along; and his state is easier to imagine than to describe. He looked for the following morning with infinite anxiety.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE NOBLE LADY AND HER FAVORITES.

THE heavy hours of day had at length given place to night.

Sterner's uneasiness increased considerably, and the god of sleep obstinately refused to permit him to close his eyes. The light from the gable chamber in Sorby Park glimmered through his window, and painfully reminded him of the poor girl on whose account it was burning. At least twenty times he stretched out his hand to his watch, and made it strike. At length, toward morning, his senses were overcome by a restless slumber; but uneasy oppressive dreams tormented him. Wilhelmina Von Stalkrona's pale countenance always appeared to come between Augusta and him. It seemed as though the faded form wanted to entice Augusta to

her, but she would not follow her, and kept looking sadly at Sterner; and when he stretched forth his arms to clasp and protect her, all disappeared, he knew not whither, and the darkness of the grave surrounded him. Then it began to brighten. It was as though he was transplanted to the room where he really was. Augusta sat by him, and they both were so indescribably happy. Wilhelmina stood at the window in deep mourning. She looked, with a melancholy but not painful expression in her beautiful face, first at them, then, with a half-smile, at a gentleman, whose features, however, were hid by the curtains. But Sterner's happiness lasted only a few minutes. He awoke, and the sad reality was again distinctly before him. It was seven o'clock in the morning. He rang.

"I can not endure this any longer," said he to himself. "I must know how she is, even if I send a messenger to make inquiries."

Again, and for the third time, he had to ring before Westerlind appeared, red and breathless, at the door, with a humble excuse for his delay on his lips, which, however, Sterner at once put an end to by exclaiming—

"Later and later! Have you heard any thing from Sorby Park yet?"

"I have just come from thence, sir!"

"What do I hear?" said Sterner, with feigned anger. "How did you dare to go there without my express commands? When it pleases me to send to inquire for Miss Von Stalkrona's health, I shall acquaint you; until then I desire that you pay no more visits to Sorby Park."

Westerlind glowed like a tulip; but this was the effect of previous excitement, for he never permitted it to be observed, either in his voice or behavior, that he felt himself insulted. But he was not the less angry, though he reserved his revenge to be evinced in a more cunning, and, therefore, perhaps, more effectual manner than one could have expected from a person in his station in life. Westerlind, who perfectly well knew what it was to bear his master's anger, answered as calmly and coldly as he himself could have done, however, with perfect humility.

"I was not at Sorby Park to ask after the young lady's health, sir; but as you are never accustomed to ring before seven o'clock, and the Inspector wished extremely to get the things home which he expected from town, I thought, as the servants at Sorby Park are so much occupied, that I might as well do him this service, as to stand gaping out of the window. If I could have suspected that I should have been so unfortunate as to incur my master's displeasure by so doing, it certainly never should have happened."

"Well, your explanation alters the matter: I do not object to your going a message for the Inspector when business is so pressing. Had the Doctor arrived yet?"

"Yes, sir."

"Has he been long there?"

"No, sir."

"Well, you certainly heard what he thought of Miss Von Stålkrona's indisposition?"

"Not in the slightest degree, sir."

"Well, what the devil were you doing when you were once there?" asked the Major, angrily.

"I fetched the Inspector's nails and rolls of tobacco, and went home with them."

"I fear I have annoyed you, my good Westerlind," said Sterner, who, notwithstanding his distress, could not help smiling at his servant's laconic answers; "and I can scarcely blame you for the dexterity with which you fortified yourself behind the nails and tobacco, because your dignity was offended; but, as I have already told you, that your first explanation has quite satisfied me, I should think you ought to be contented, for you can not expect any other satisfaction. Therefore, as I know you too well to suppose that you could have been at Sorrbý Park without making more particular inquiries, say at once, briefly and sincerely, how matters are there."

Sterner had, in the mean time, dressed himself, and now stood at the table, playing, either with or without intention, with a well-filled green pocket-book. Westerlind's heart began to beat with delightful anticipation when he saw this movement, so full of meaning; his heart expanded before the talisman which that beautiful book inclosed.

"It would little become me," said he, softly, "to be vexed when my master is so kind as to excuse my delay and its cause. I learnt at Sorrbý Park, in great haste, from Miss Lisette, that her young mistress had yesterday evening ceased to be delirious, and during the night had enjoyed a calm slumber. This morning she is perfectly sensible, but so exhausted that the Doctor says he can form no decided opinion as to the effect of the illness as yet; however, he had every reason to hope for the best. I heard him say this to Cornet Axel, as they met in the drawing-room. Directly after dinner the Doctor returns home."

"That is what I call sensibly answered, my good Westerlind," said Sterner, placing his pocket-book into his waistcoat pocket. "About twelve o'clock I shall pay Lieutenant-colonel Stålkrona a visit: see to the dogs in the mean time. We shall ride out in the afternoon."

Westerlind followed the pocket-book, as it took its way unopened to the coat, with the lurking look of a cat when she watches, from branch to branch, the movements of a sparrow; but he did not lose all hope yet.

"Might I beg," began he, coughing, and in a most pitiful tone, so different from his

usual manner, "to be allowed to make a little journey on my own account to-day?"

"Certainly you may; but you look as miserable as if your journey would lead you to death."

"Ah, yes, indeed, it is not much better!" sighed Westerlind.

"Tell me what oppresses you, Westerlind? and don't let the matter trouble you."

"If you desire it, sir," began Westerlind, with well-feigned reluctance. "When I was first sent to Wallaryd this winter, I wanted a small sum for a little matter; the innkeeper in Alviken lent it to me, when I was traveling through. I should have paid it back last week, and he has sent a message to threaten me with a summons if I don't repay him by Tuesday. I should, therefore, like to go to him and beg him for a delay of a few weeks."

"It is very wrong of you, Westerlind," said the Major, gravely. "to spend more than your wages amount to. You have not been four months in my service, and have already received three-fourths of your salary. I am not extravagant myself, and do not choose that my servants should practice this vice. You must learn to be more economical in future; this once, however, I will help you out of your dilemma at my own expense."

Sterner then asked the amount, and on being told, exclaimed:

"Hum! let me see the bond when you return. You can not be so bold as to be throwing dust in my eyes!"

"The Lord forbid! How can you think so badly of me, sir? No, heaven be thanked, I have always been honest; but as to the bond, the inn-keeper would not take any from me when I told him in whose service I was; but said it was sufficient if I were in his books. But there were witnesses present, in case you would like to see them, sir."

"Oh no! I can't take that trouble. There, you have the money!" He handed the servant the sum, who thankfully bowed. "Bear in mind in future never to run into debt."

"No, heaven forbid!" said Westerlind. "I shall treasure my master's advice as carefully in my heart as his kindness; and far be it from me to misuse the one or the other!"

Rejoicing inwardly he deposited the bank notes in his pocket. An hour later he was galloping on his way to the inn, at Alviken, which was three miles* distant from Sorrbý. He who saw him would have sworn that his ride had quite another object than to beg for a little more time to pay his debt.

"I shall be there by two," said Westerlind to himself, as he looked at his watch, which pointed to ten o'clock. "It will do very well! The devil! How wisely I play my part: that is what I call killing two birds

* Three Swedish miles, which are much longer than the English.

with one stone. An excellent lesson; I will swear to the end of my life, that fate favors the bold. This is an unexpected piece of good fortune, and how much shall I gain by my journey? People of rank do not often give such as myself trouble for nothing. But if my good Major got the slightest suspicion of my boldness, and the true object of this little tour—he . . . I almost fancy I feel the weight of his cane upon my back! I have no liking for such scenes; they always have a prejudicial influence on body and soul. However, with my caution one can turn aside every thing; therefore, courage! courage! Westerlind!"

With such meditations the *honest* servant pursued his way, with such haste that both he and his horse stood bathed in perspiration, precisely at two o'clock, at the inn of Alvicken; and immediately after a traveling carriage stopped at the door.

At five o'clock in the afternoon, Major Sterner set forth to make his first visit to Sorby Park.

With a mixed feeling of pain and anger, at the curiosity which had involved him in this misfortune, he passed the little bridge, where the sad event had occurred, whose consequences had become so important. He arrived at the court-yard without meeting any one; the first object which met his view might lay claim to a closer description.

In the middle of the grass-plot stood an antiquated, rickety, and decaying garden bench, of which Baroness Von Stålkrona had taken possession. She had on a dirty-brown morning gown, which for convenience sake, was also used in the afternoon, when strangers were not expected. Upon her head were the remains of a once tasteful cap, and over this was flung a black silk shawl, whose appearance testified the good service it had done. Upon one side of the Baroness's bench stood a water-trough; on the other, a basket of oats; and opposite her hopped in motley confusion, all the little beings which the Baroness had honored with the name of her favorites. Hens, chickens, ducks, geese, turkeys, and a whole legion of goslings, flew, fluttered, and rushed, with immoderate demonstrations of joy, round their benefactress, who, with the one hand guarded her basket of oats from the attacks of the boldest of her favorites, while with the other she dealt out to each a few fingers' full of the precious contents. The Baroness turned quickly round at the noise which Sterner made as he opened the garden door, which was painted red.

It is said, one ought never to turn too sharply round; assuredly, one ought never to do so, particularly when sitting on so unsteady a seat as that on which the Baroness was perched. Let the accident we are going to relate be added to many other warning examples. At the moment that the

Baroness turned her head to the right, and was most disagreeably surprised by the sight of the Major, she lost her equilibrium; the consequence was, the rickety old bench upset; and the noble lady, enveloped in her long fluttering morning gown, fell backward, to the great terror of her feathered favorites, who hastened to take flight in all directions. Sterner felt an extreme desire to laugh, and it was with great difficulty he restrained himself; but a certain feeling of respect checked his mirth to an almost imperceptible smile. Before he had time to help her, the Baroness had already risen; red as a peony, she received her guest with the words—

"We thought—we hoped, that you would have done us the honor of announcing your visit, Major Sterner."

"Honored lady," answered Sterner, respectfully kissing the hand, which with difficulty she had freed from a chocolate colored glove, and offered him. "Permit me to excuse my boldness with the hope which I ventured to entertain, that I might be allowed to wait upon Colonel Von Stålkrona, and his respected family, not in the character of a stranger, but in that of a neighbor and friend."

"If that be the case, Major," said the Baroness, appeased by his respectful courtesy and his perfectly serious manner, which also had the effect of quieting the disagreeable thought, that she might at this moment be the object of his ridicule. "If that be the case, I beg you will consider yourself heartily welcome. The trouble which prevails in my house, in consequence of the sudden indisposition of my eldest daughter, must be my excuse for the carelessness of my attire."

"Pray," said the Major, in a flattering tone, "do not embarrass me by making such excuses. If I might be so bold as to speak of myself, I should say that I prize friendly intercourse much more than formal politeness, and that it is my earnest desire to be considered as a friend in your house, with whom compliments are not necessary."

"We are much obliged to you, Major Sterner," smiled the noble lady, who was considerably relieved by Sterner's unassuming words. "We can receive a friend at any hour, without making any preparations; but it is quite a different thing with a stranger, who judges the house in general from the impression which the first visit makes on him; and I must, therefore, tell you, that mine can certainly bear no criticism to-day. Away, my children! are you not ashamed of yourselves!" exclaimed the Baroness, interrupting herself, as she hastened to the basket of oats, which her pets (who were recovered from their fright), were busily engaged easing of its contents. She took the basket under her arm, cast an angry look at the little ones, and then turning again to

Stern, with an apology for this interruption, led him into a small drawing-room, which, simply but tastefully furnished, testified that order was not foreign to the house, although at the first glance at the person of the hostess, there was no cause to suppose that it belonged to her cardinal virtues. But this was not the case. She loved order, indeed, every where; but with reference to her own person, she generally preferred to be quite *comfortable*, as she called it.

As soon as the Baroness had introduced her guest, and consigned him to the care of her son, the Cornet, who was the only person who happened to be in the room, she hastened to her own apartment, to make herself quite another being. About half an hour after she returned, dressed in that neatness and elegance for which she was noted, when she wished to appear to advantage. She interrupted, as it seemed, an interesting conversation between the two young men.

"Oh! how annoying it is that Papa is not at home. Do you know, Major, that he accompanied the Doctor to town a few hours ago?"

"I hope I shall have the pleasure of meeting the Colonel another time," answered Stern, politely. "The object of my visit was to pay my respects to you, and was on no account for the sake of business."

At these words a look of pleasure illuminated the features of the Baroness as well as those of the Cornet. The latter said: "Permit us to hope, Major Stern, that you will very often honor us with the pleasure of your society, as long as you remain in Sorby. My father would be very sorry if his absence to-day deprived him of the promise you gave him. If I remember rightly, he counts upon your spending a whole day at Sorby Park."

"So it was," answered Stern; "but in consequence of Miss Von Stalkrona's indisposition, I thought it better to defer this pleasure to some more convenient time. Perhaps I have not showed by my present visit sufficient delicacy in venturing to intrude upon a family where anxiety and sorrow must make strangers unwelcome."

"A sympathizing fellow-creature," said Axel, heartily, "though he be in a certain degree a stranger, is still always welcome. Heaven be praised, we have no great cause for alarm, for the Doctor has declared Wilhelmina out of all danger, if no peculiar circumstance throws her back. She now only requires rest and sensible treatment."

"I am extremely rejoiced," said Stern, sympathizingly, "Doctor Sommer is considered an excessively skillful physician, and one can depend upon his word."

"Yesterday morning," continued the Cornet, "we had no hope of so favorable an issue. You can not imagine, Major Stern,

how oddly and suddenly this illness began. The Doctor declares my sister must have been frightened and extremely agitated, and doubtless this was the case. Now, that she has entirely recovered her senses, I have tried to persuade her to confide to me the cause; but it was entirely impossible to get her to confess. 'Do not distress me with questions, Axel,' said she after a while, 'it makes me suffer,' and then she turned her head away to hide that she was weeping. It is evident that she tries to keep something secret."

"Oh, nonsense, she has caught cold, Axel," said the Baroness. "I was just so when I was taken ill a few years ago. One weeps, one is peevish, timid, one knows not why, and nothing is more natural than that such attacks are connected with illness. My dear Major, pray take a cup of tea."

The Baroness poured out a cup while she made her remarks. Stern, although innocent, nevertheless felt a guilty blush upon his cheeks. To hide his embarrassment, he bent low over the Baroness's tea-cup, and the little basket of tea-cakes, out of which he, in his absence of mind, took a handful of biscuits."

"Well, I call that very kind, Major Stern," smiled the Baroness, "thus to honor my biscuits. It always wins my heart to meet any one who does not want much pressing to make himself at home. But young people do not often care for any thing along with their tea."

Stern first looked at the Baroness, then at the cup of tea he held in his hand, when to his increasing embarrassment he became aware, that while absorbed in his thoughts he had arranged no less than seven beautiful large cracknels round his saucer. In the utmost confusion he laid five of them back, and kept two.

"I beg pardon, dear madam! I have the bad habit of being now and then a little absent—it was entirely a mistake."

"Not at all, my dear Major," said the lady; "on the contrary it was a *very good take*: let me beg you to have another!"

But the Major, from pure vexation, was scarcely able to swallow what he had got. At length the contents of the cup were happily dispatched, and with a respectful bow he placed it on the table.

"May I not offer you another cup?" asked the Baroness.

"No, I thank you."

As the Baroness was now occupied giving the maid some directions in a low voice, Stern seized the opportunity of joining the Cornet.

"It is very odd," said he to Axel, possibly only for something to say, and to show the Cornet that he had been listening to what he had said of his sister's illness—"It is very extraordinary that Miss Von Stalkrona

is so reserved in this respect. Could this possibly be the case if there were any grounds for your conjectures?"

"Certainly," said Axel, "she has an unusual character; although she is so soft and susceptible, yet, when she chooses, she can be firm and independent; and, though it were only some vision which her lively and somewhat sentimental imagination had conjured up, I'll vouch for it the secret will die with her. If the matter relates to herself, she has the strength to bury it in some corner of her soul, far from the cold glance of the stranger."

This trait in Miss Von Stalkrona's character was just to Sterner's taste; it inspired him with the hope that when some suitable occasion offered itself of acquainting her with the reasons which made a more tender connection between them impossible, this confidence would not fail in its effects on a soul like hers. Sterner trusted to his skill in the management of so delicate a matter. In answer to Axel's description of Wilhelmina, he said in a few words, that he considered people with such a character extremely fortunate; for they generally maintained their ground, while others, less firm, were driven out of their course, and tossed here and there by the tempests of fate, and were not seldom dashed to pieces against the breakers which threaten to crush the frail bark of life.

After these general remarks, Sterner took his leave, and withdrew with Cornet Axel, who accompanied him to Sorrbý.

On the way the gentlemen had been so absorbed in the important subject of hunting and dogs, that they determined to try their luck together the following morning. The Cornet supped with his new friend, and it was late before they separated.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE SISTERS.

NEARLY a week had now expired, Wilhelmina, it is true, was entirely out of danger; but debility still prevented her from rising.

One evening the Major paid another visit to Sorrbý Park, and was just about to leave it, in company with Cornet Axel, to take part in a little fishing party, when Aurora, who was standing at the window, peeping out from behind the curtain, perceived the two gentlemen in the court.

"He is going now, Wilhelmina," said she, looking after them as they gradually disappeared in the winding of the valley, "what a figure the Major has, and his walk, and carriage! Axel, who formerly used to be considered a perfect Adonis here in the country, has found a rival, whom he can

not come up to, at least not when they are together, as now—what do you think, dear Wilhelmina?"

"I can not see them any more," answered she, turning her head away, "but the Major is passable enough."

"Passable enough!" said Aurora, mimicking her—"Yes, the whole world can see that. But those eyes, at once so fiery and full of feeling, and at times so serious and full of kindness, that white, lofty, and slightly arched brow, on which candor is written in distinct and clear characters; and then a certain something which I can not express, a pride, not such as papa's, for that leads to nothing good, but a noble pride, which becomes him so extremely well, when he is more than usually excited on a subject; then that beautiful high nose, which reminds one of the old Roman heroes, those fresh red lips, round which so mild and sweet a smile is always playing, as if to reflect the most excellent of hearts—all this added to the most beautiful dark brown locks, which ever shaded a manly face, can, I should think, lay claim to something more than merely a passable appearance."

Aurora, sprightly and gay, and still entirely unacquainted with that mischievous enemy to quiet and harmless dispositions, never suspected that by this lively description, she was pressing the dart deeper and deeper into her sister's wounded heart.

Wilhelmina did not answer; she only passed her pocket-handkerchief over her burning brow, and complained of the heat.

"How are you, dear Mina?" asked Aurora—"you almost look as though the wretched fever was returning. Ah, how glowing red you are! poor Mina! Will you take some of your cooling powder?" asked she lovingly and innocently.

"No, not yet, Aurora; I can do without it at present. But tell me, have you forgotten your favorite and declared lover, Ensign Schmoll, that you can so eloquently—"

"Praise the Major, do you mean?" continued Aurora. "No, my dear, I like Schmoll as much as ever. I trust that he will soon return from the meeting for military manoeuvres, or rather from W——, for Axel tells me he is afterward going there. With Schmoll I can chat, laugh, run, and ride races to my heart's content, for I am quite as gay as he; yes, know also, Mina, that when he is a captain, and gets his company, and a good residence, I will give him my heart and hand, will exchange my name for his. We have already agreed about that, if we don't change our minds before then. But don't you see, dear Mina, that does not prevent me from thinking Major Sterner an unusually charming man—he is also very compassionate. I could relate to you something about that, which I heard from the Inspector's wife, in Sorrbý, a few days ago."

"It is not right of you, Aurora," said Mina, in the decided tone of an elder sister, "to gossip thus with every body who comes and goes about the house. This is a habit which never leads to good."

"Well, my love, what was the harm of it?" said Aurora. "I accompanied Madam Bildberg as far as the little Allée on her way home, and she told me what Westerlind, the Major's valet, confided to her."

"And you could actually let yourself so down as to listen to this? fie, Aurora! Servants' gossip is surely no fit subject for us to listen to, or to repeat."

"Well, I will be silent," said Aurora. "Perhaps you wish to sleep?" Mina nodded her head in the affirmative; so the good-natured girl took her work and seated herself as quietly as possible in the furthest corner of the chamber. But Mina never felt herself less sleepy than at this moment. She wished with all her heart that her sister had not so readily obeyed her hint; for now she racked her brains in vain to find out what Madam Bildberg could possibly have to tell, and if it were likely that Sterner would let his servant suspect the feelings which influenced him.

After she had turned and tossed in her bed for a while, she said as indifferently as she could: "I see I shall not be able to enjoy any sleep this evening. You may therefore begin your nonsense again, Aurora; it makes the time pass quicker."

"With my nonsense! Pray, what do you honor with this title?" asked Aurora, with a blush of annoyance glowing on her dimpling rosy cheeks.

"All that you were mentioning before about the inhabitants of Sorrbý."

"Oh, no, dear Mina, it is mere gossip!—servants' gossip; and even though it were of the most interesting nature, it is surely not a fit subject of conversation for us; it can lead to nothing good. Is that not the case? But I must not be so wicked; I see how much you long to know all about it, so I will relate what I heard."

Blushing at the weakness which she had betrayed to Aurora, Wilhelmina turned away, and said coldly, "Do as you please, my love, I am perfectly indifferent about it."

"No, now you are not speaking sincerely," said Aurora. "It is really not worth while to give one's self such airs about, so listen." Hereupon Aurora began to pour out her news: "The Major has doubtlessly fallen in love with you, for he was seized with the most frightful anxiety when he learnt that you were ill; and at the first good account which he received from Westerlind (it was on the same day he made his first visit here), he gave his servant a handsome sum of money. What do you say to that, Mina?"

"I say," answered Mina, quickly, and with no slight vexation, "that it is complete

nonsense; there is no connection in it. How can you make that agree with the Major's delicacy? Would he, let his feelings be what they may, have publicly made known his interest in a manner so wounding to my pride? It is impossible; and I beg, Aurora, that when you and Madam Bildberg hold your communications together, I may never again form the subject of your discourse."

Aurora looked at her sister in some astonishment; then turning quietly away from her, without saying a word, she shook the above-mentioned cooling-powder into a cup. "Drink, dear Mina," said she, affectionately; "I see that the fever not only makes you ill, but peevish."

But Wilhelmina pushed the cup, and the kind hand which offered it to her away. "I wish to be in peace, and alone," said she, in a decided tone. "Go down to mamma, Aurora! I am perfectly well!"

Silently, like a soft obedient child, Aurora left the room. She was sixteen years of age, and had always been accustomed to look upon Wilhelmina, who had three years the advantage of her in age, but six in sense, as something between friend, mother, and sister.

When Wilhelmina was alone, two large tears forced their way between her eyelashes, and rolled slowly down her burning cheeks.

"Oh, heavens!" sighed she, "if this be true, my hope was only a dream! If he loved, he could not be able to violate his feelings by questions to his servant; and he could then have drawn no conclusions. Ah! I understand it all too well! The disagreeable feeling that he was the author, although innocently, of this unpleasant accident has aroused his pity; and pity for an invalid one need never conceal, for there is nothing very peculiar in that. Sterner has no affection for me; no, none! and his servant has dared to explain his words according to the interpretation his limited understanding has chosen to put upon them."

What pain it cost Wilhelmina to arrive at this result!

It is true, hope tried to console her with the possibility that she might be mistaken; but it was horrible to be torn to pieces between deceitful hope and fear, whose sting went deeper and deeper in the bleeding wound she had opened herself.

The evening passed in gloomy melancholy. During many days Wilhelmina was obliged to keep her bed, for she not only suffered bodily, but mentally. In the mean time, the period fixed for Sterner's journey back to L— was approaching.

The day after the Colonel's return home he paid a visit to Sorrbý; and on this occasion greatly moderated his usually overbearing haughtiness. The Major was an extremely agreeable and courteous host. They dined

together most pleasantly; spoke of agricultural matters and politics; drank, smoked, played, and took a walk: in short, they were both equally pleased, and not a word was mentioned on either side about dams and meadows. The Colonel flattered himself that his condescension was a more than adequate indemnification for the loss of his opponent. Sterner, on the contrary, thought that as the Colonel conducted himself as sensibly, politely, and agreeably as most men, it were a pity to annoy him with unpleasant matters, which might very well remain for some future occasion. This gave rise to a certain intimate footing, which was agreeable to all parties. The Major dined three times a week at Sorrbj Park, and Axel was daily at Sorrbj. He and Sterner had become inseparable. They read, practiced music, rode, hunted, and fished together. They paid visits to all the neighbors, and were every where welcome and sought after. It was, however, remarked that the Major was particularly well received in those houses where there were marriageable daughters, who were all bidders for the great prize.

More than a fortnight had passed. Sterner should have been in L——, but it was impossible for him to leave Sorrbj, without first having spoken to Wilhelmina. Now and then he was troubled with the thought, that report might bear on her swift wings some dubious tales to Augusta, which, by his absence, might seem to be true. He remarked that people began already to joke him about a nearer connection with the Colonel's house. Although this was groundless, yet Sterner did not choose to give the slightest cause for reports which might injure both young ladies. Therefore, the third week he did not go so often to Sorrbj Park, and at length determined to delay his journey no longer, however disagreeable it was to him not to see Wilhelmina, once more before his departure, and to say a few kind words to her.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A MONITOR DEALS OUT HIS INSTRUCTIONS.

Perhaps my apparent coldness is only the snowy veil which covers a volcano.
LINDBERGER.

ONE morning when young Axel was visiting his friend (it was about the end of June) the latter said—

"To-morrow I start for L——, and from thence to Helsingborg, to meet my cousin there."

"Ay, ay, what a round-about way," said the Cornet; "why do you not go straight to Helsingborg? What takes you to L——?"

"Business with the post-inspector, Von Spalden, which, as you can easily guess, is

in consequence of my mission, and the speedy arrival of the heir."

"Ah, I recollect something about that romantic affair. Is Miss Von Spalden beautiful? Perhaps she is like her cousin, Miss Stolzenbeck."

"Not in the slightest degree," Sterner assured him; "she is in every respect so far superior to Henrietta that there can be no comparison between them, either as regards education, ability, or amiability."

"That is, indeed, saying a great deal," said Axel; "but as it comes from you, it must surely be true; for although you are a most agreeable cavalier, yet with us you have not distinguished yourself as an ardent admirer of those charming beings whom I have heard called 'the angels of the earth,' you understand I mean beautiful damsels."

"No, in general I am no friend to that kind of admiration which is constantly upon the lips of most young men," answered Sterner: "I seldom express my thoughts on such delicate matters; but when I do utter such admiration it is always the sentiments of my heart and conviction."

"Then you consider Henrietta Von Stolzenbeck a very commonplace girl," said Axel.

"Yes, very commonplace," answered the Major; "she has a fresh and agreeable appearance, and a certain air of command which under other circumstances would not be bad, and to some is very attractive. This would become her very well, if it unfortunately did not form the principal trait in her character; and if one were not by its prominence reminded of a spoiled child, who can be amiable as long as it gets its own way, but becomes ill-tempered and obstinate at the least opposition. Nature has not been unkind to her, in any respect; but flattery, vanity, and a careless education, have had a sad effect upon her character. Her heart is good, but there is not the slightest hold on her mind—it is empty. She would be astonished herself if she possessed the power of penetrating through the thick veil of self-love and false confidence, and beholding the unfortunate wilderness which there reigns. She is formed for an inferior part in social life, but not for the superior. She is entirely unfit for the quiet domestic circle, and does not care for it. According to my opinion she is not the wife to make a sensible man happy."

Axel remained silent a few moments; then he said—

"But she is engaged to your cousin, your best friend."

"Yes, she is," answered Sterner; "Constantine has a gay and easy character. The impression of a moment sets his soul in fire and flames; but he is also right-minded, good, and sensible. Heaven grant that his eyes may either be opened in time, or that he may never outlive the day he finds out

—then too late—that he has set his future happiness on a dangerous game.”

“Ay,” said Axel, slowly, “I must tell you that I should most probably have shared the same fate as your cousin, if I had not learnt on that eventful night that Henrietta was engaged to him; for she appeared to me so indescribably charming, innocent, and *naïve*: then the feelings of the moment always exercise their power over me, so that in that respect I resemble Constantine. But what will you say to such a confession?”

“That I knew the tenor of it before,” replied the Major, smiling; “but a sensible man makes use of the strength which our good mother, Nature, has placed in his soul, and by which he maintains his own dignity. He can not desire to create an interest in a being, whose vanity, excited by the slightest attention, is always waging war with her duty. It was evident that you took a proper view of the case, and acted upon it, from your not renewing the acquaintance, notwithstanding that it could have been so easily brought about during the time the family spent at Ulrikedal. Your behavior at that time, Axel, was the cause of my respect for you, and of the friendship which I flatter myself you prize more than a passing triumph; for believe what I say, even though Henrietta were free, she could never have understood or returned sincere love. You have lost nothing.”

“I believe you, I believe you with all my heart, Alexander,” said Axel, shaking hands with him cordially; “this conversation will be of great use to me, for I confess, that her image incessantly floated before me in those luxuriant, sparkling colors which dawning love lends to the object of its affections. But the confidence I place in your words, experience, and observation, convinces me that it was not reality, but only imagination which adorned her with those charms of which I dreamt both sleeping and waking. The whole adventure was so romantic that my young heart naturally took fire. But heaven be praised this flame is not of an unquenchable nature, and I hope you will do me the justice to believe that it requires more than a passing admiration to fix my heart and choice.”

“I do indeed,” answered Sterner, seriously, “and to prove this to you, I do not hesitate to tell you a piece of news which I received from Constantine to-day. He is going to start from his usual station for West-Gothland, while Henrietta and her mother spend some time in the watering-place of —”

With these words the Major fixed his eyes on the Cornet, for the latter intended to visit the same watering-place.

Axel answered gayly: “She shall find as good an adviser in me, as if you yourself were there, my dear friend, for other peo-

ple's property is under all circumstances sacred to me. I shall be interested to see if she deserves the confidence which her intended thus places in her, by leaving her to herself.”

“Thanks, my worthy friend,” said Sterner, “you have anticipated my wishes. You must know, that ever since our youthful days I have been attached to Constantine with the love and solicitude of a brother; nay, almost of a father. He was the only being who bound me by the ties of friendship to a world, where all that was dear to me was so early snatched from me, that, even so far back as when the mind is scarcely matured for the miseries of life, I stood alone in a strange home. Oh, Axel! you do not know, and never have known, the bitterness of such a life. But heaven be praised, the scene was not always so gloomy. On mine, also, there were bright spots. I have had adversities and trials; but Joy has sometimes handed me her cup. I have seen the world, life, and mankind, not through the magnifying and diminishing glass of writers of novels and travels; no, I have seen them with my own eyes. I have rejoiced with the happy, wept with the sad, and my soul has beheld with unbounded enthusiasm the glorious master-pieces of art and nature. Oh, how rich is life! what inexhaustible enjoyments it offers to him who knows where to seek them in their truest, purest sources!

“But my thoughts have been wandering to the secret halls of those temples where dwell the silent past: I was speaking of Constantine. His happiness has ever been one of my greatest desires, and always will be so. My soul is troubled on account of this union, and it is not without fear for them both, that I see his intended bride in a place where her natural inclination for coquetry can have more scope than usual. However, this journey may be of use. You will give me a faithful account of her conduct during the season at this bathing-place. If it is such as becomes a young lady who, being engaged, does not frivolously think she has the right, like one who is free, to accept the homage offered to her; but if, by a certain something which we men can better feel than express, she keeps her admirers at that imperceptible, yet sufficient distance, which women of education know so well and so easily how to define, without hurting the feelings of him toward whom it is employed, then I will willingly be the first to apologize in my heart for the wrong which I have done her. Have you understood me, Axel, and comprehended the reasons for my caution?”

“Perfectly, Alexander! you will find in me a faithful ally. I know how to value the zeal, and, at the same time, the delicacy with which you watch over and act for Constantine, without wishing to cause him

any uneasiness, before your suspicions are confirmed. You can perfectly reckon on my services. Argus's eyes could not be more sure than mine."

"Well, heaven be thanked," said the Major, "so the thing is arranged! amuse yourself in the mean time with a book, while I make a necessary toilet; for it is getting on to twelve o'clock."

"You must change the word necessary for careful," said Axel, jokingly; "for I have not yet told you that my eldest sister, the queen of all graces, far and near, is at last so far recovered, that she has promised to come down to dinner this afternoon; after which we shall all take a little walk. Poor Mina! it is so long since she has enjoyed the fresh air, I hope and trust it will do her good."

"Oh, what pleasure this news gives me," said Sterner, in a tone which bore witness to the truth of his words. "Your sister is so extremely sweet and amiable, Axel," added he, slowly, she is just the sort of wife I should wish for Constantine."

After these words he left the room suddenly, and Axel thought in his inmost heart:

"Why not for himself?"

A little while after both the friends were on their way to Sorrbj Park.

Every thing in Sorrbj Park seemed to wear a festive appearance. Every one was cheerful, for all-loved her, who, after a lingering illness, was again for the first time about to take her place in the circle where she had been so long missed. When the two gentlemen entered the room, Wilhelmina was reclining on the sofa in a half-lying position. She almost seemed as white as the tasteful white dress which encircled her elegant youthful form. A shawl of light-blue crape was thrown carelessly over her shoulders, and the dark ringlets combed smoothly over the beautiful white forehead clustered on each side from beneath an extremely tasteful little lace cap. To soften the dazzling glare of the sun, the red silk blinds had been let down; and the subdued light thus caused cast over the whole a faint transparent purple glow.

The two gentlemen stood a moment in silent admiration. She was truly beautiful; a calm, earnest repose lighted up her lovely features.

"You are, indeed, a sweet child," said Axel, affectionately kissing her on the forehead.

The Major stepped nearer, but it was with his usual easy deportment. He sought to subdue his emotion, and it was great; for, with grief he perceived the alteration which had taken place in her whole appearance since the day he met her at Mrs. Svalenius's *fête*.

Wilhelmina did not know that an outward proof betrayed the tempest which raged in-

wardly. She fixed her eyes on Sterner with calm dignity, as he took her hand, and expressed in a few simple words his joy at her recovery.

"The roast meat will get cold," said the Baroness; "what is papa thinking of, that he does not come!"

At that moment the Colonel entered the room, and in as cordial a manner as he was capable of, welcomed Sterner.

They immediately took their seats at table, the conversation turned on general subjects, until the Colonel said, suddenly—

"I hear from Axel, that you intend to leave us to-morrow, Major Sterner! we shall miss you extremely."

Sterner was seated opposite to Wilhelmina. At these words he cast a hasty glance across the table, and saw how her pale cheeks were dyed with a deep blush, the blood seemed as though it would burst through the fine veins. Her hand slightly trembled as she handed her neighbor at table a little dish; but not a word escaped her lips, although the Baroness and Aurora poured forth their eloquence, and loaded the Major with expressions of their surprise and sorrow at so soon losing his agreeable society. A painful feeling went through Sterner's soul, and he answered, laying a stress on his words—

"A double duty calls me from here, but no one can feel greater pleasure than I, that you permit me to return, and renew these days which have become so invaluable to me, from the friendship and kindness with which my esteemed host and his family have cheered my otherwise so lonely life in Sorrbj."

The Lieutenant-colonel bowed graciously, and beckoned to his son, who was ordered to bring a particularly fine bottle of port wine, which in Sorrbj Park, where wine was so seldom drunk, was considered as an unheard-of mark of respect to the guest of the house. When the cork had been drawn with great ceremony, and Miss Aurora had returned with the wine-glasses, the Colonel filled them with his own hand, and proposed a toast to the continuance of friendly and neighborly feelings between the two houses. Sterner returned thanks in his cousin's name, and they rose from table.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE IMPORTANT EXPLANATION.

A BEAUTIFUL cool evening had followed the heat of the day, and the young people determined to take a stroll in the Park. As Aurora had seized her brother's arm without any ceremony, Sterner was obliged to offer his to Wilhelmina. Aurora had so many improvements to show Axel, and drew him so quickly forward, that Sterner and Wilhel-

mina soon found themselves alone. Walking had fatigued her, therefore they seated themselves on a low bank of turf.

"Miss Von Stålkrona," began Sterner, for until now not a word had been spoken by either of them, "how often have I accused and reproached myself—"

"Oh, cease, Major Sterner, don't let us speak of it, I pray you; let it be forgotten; the event was quite an accident, a mere trifle and nothing more. One catches cold in a thousand different ways!"

Her voice, although calm, still betrayed symptoms of the fearful agitation which she felt. Sterner also fancied that she was offended, and this truly was the case. Nothing could be more natural and more common than to begin the conversation with "Miss Von Stålkrona," but his accosting her thus formally, without any more intimate epithet, struck an icy coldness to her heart. Every word he uttered, the tone of his voice, his look, his whole conduct, convinced her that she had deceived herself. All expressed kind sympathy; it was too evident to her, however, that there was not a trace of any deeper interest; but this was no time to allow her weakness to be seen. Without the slightest outward appearance of embarrassment or agitation, she began to talk of the beauty of the surrounding country. The Major agreed with her, and said, after a short pause—

"I had, also, some intention of buying Ulriksdal at the same time that I thought of Sorrbý; but I hope my cousin will be better pleased with the latter, since it has the advantage of a much more beautiful situation."

"Tastes differ," said Wilhelmina: "perhaps he would have preferred Ulriksdal; but I fancy I have heard that the widowed Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck was also in treaty to purchase the property. Did nothing come of it?"

"No; she found the terms too high, and the place itself, which she came to see during last Whitsuntide, too much out of order: she therefore intends to retain her house in F——"

"I can easily fancy that this would be more to Miss Von Stolzenbeck's taste; she would have found much too little society here in the country to compensate for the gay life to which she has been accustomed."

"If," answered Sterner, "she had had the pleasure of becoming intimately acquainted with Miss Von Stålkrona, I am convinced she would not have regretted her former associates."

"I venture to say," replied Wilhelmina, in a tone of mingled pride and consciousness, "that there Major Sterner is mistaken. The ladies of Sorrbý Park could not pretend to compensate for such a loss."

Sterner was much surprised at this answer: he perceived that report had preju-

diced Miss Von Stålkrona against Henrietta; but, as in the goodness of his heart, he did not wish to increase this dislike, he said, in a deprecating tone:

"As my future relation, Miss Stolzenbeck has some claim to my protection; but, as far as I know, she does not require the slightest vindication."

"Major Sterner is an eloquent champion," said Wilhelmina; "but I did not mean to say any thing against the young lady; although from the description that has been given to me of her, I am still of opinion that we should not suit each other, if this expression is less offensive to you."

"No expression from Miss Stålkrona's lips can be offensive," said Sterner, respectfully, "only I was sorry to find that Henrietta was so badly thought of by a lady whom I so highly esteem."

"My opinion," replied Wilhelmina, modestly, "can be of no importance; both because I have no personal knowledge of the young lady, and because I have little experience of fashionable manners. But tell me, before we leave the subject, if she is as beautiful as Axel has maintained ever since he played the part of knight-errant during that memorable adventure?"

Here Wilhelmina blushed deeply, and added, in great confusion—

"It is not for me, of course, to allude to adventures of a romantic nature; it was quite an oversight, with no particular reference to any thing."

"I am perfectly convinced of that," said Sterner; "but in answer to your question—" Sterner determined to make use of the turn which the conversation had taken to speak out his thoughts—"I must say, that she is not beautiful, at least according to my ideas of beauty. It is possible, however, that in this I am not an impartial judge; because—"

Sterner felt as much embarrassment as if he were about to declare his love for Miss Von Stålkrona herself.

"Because!" said Wilhelmina, putting an end to a long silence—"Pray be so good as to continue!"

"Because, all my ideas in this respect are united in one single object."

"Indeed!" stammered Wilhelmina, in the most painful anxiety; for she did not quite catch the meaning of these words.

"And, if it would not be too bold," continued Sterner, "to ask your taste on the matter, I would show you a portrait of her who is my *beau idéal* of all that is charming." So saying, he unclasped the chain to which Augusta's portrait hung, and handed it to Wilhelmina, who contemplated it with a look in which were blended astonishment, pain, and utter despair. Sterner scarcely dared to breathe, awaiting in intense anxiety the words he was to hear.

"I have often dreamt of angels," murmur-

ed she, so softly that it was scarcely audible. "This picture reminds me of one of them. She is more than beautiful; for the lovely exterior portrays the superior qualities of the soul, so faithfully and vividly traced in those speaking eyes, and in that fair open brow."

Wilhelmina was silent a moment.

"Her name?" asked she, hesitatingly.

"Is for the present buried in my heart," answered Sterner. "But, should my most earnest wish be ever accomplished, should I be permitted to call her my wife, then," said he, taking the portrait back—"then, I know nothing that could possibly increase my happiness, except that Miss Von Stalkrona should bestow her friendship upon her. To see you both united as sisters, would, indeed, be bliss in the highest degree."

Words can not express the intense pain which thrilled through Wilhelmina's soul at that moment. And perhaps the most bitter thought of all was, that Sterner had made her his confidante only for her own peace sake. He had divined her weakness, and himself handed her the plank by which she was to save herself, before she was irretrievably borne away into the boundless sea of passion.

Although much mortified, she could not help recognizing the generosity of his conduct; she, therefore, drew herself up slowly, and said in a tone of voice, which, though somewhat trembling, still evinced tolerable firmness and strength of mind—

"Major Sterner's wife will always find in Wilhelmina Stalkrona a tender sister and a true friend."

Deeply moved, for Sterner's heart, although hardened, was still a human heart, he bent over the young girl's hand, pressed it to his lips, and said—

"Permit me, next to her whose image no other woman can drive from my heart, to offer to you my gratitude and respectful homage. The remembrance of the noble and high-minded Wilhelmina will ever remain imprinted here, in characters not to be effaced."

Wilhelmina bowed in silence, drew back her hand, and went as fast as her strength would permit her in the direction in which Axel and Aurora had disappeared. The Major followed a few steps behind her. The foot-path was small; and indeed this proved a great blessing; for when people are walking side-by-side, politeness requires that they should say a few words to each other: when, however, they are obliged to follow each other, and at the same time are engaged putting aside the entangled branches which bend toward each other in every direction, a good excuse is offered for silence. Sterner and the young lady had so entirely exhausted the subjects of their conversation, that the obstacles which prevented any further communication were most heartily welcomed by

both. The little party was soon reunited, and now the Major had an opportunity of admiring the presence of mind and calmness with which Wilhelmina, until then so little practiced in self-command, could hide every trace of her previous emotion. She spoke of general matters with apparently undivided attention, and sincerely interested herself in all the little trifles which occupied Aurora, as she suggested a thousand propositions for beautifying certain spots in the park without much expense. Wilhelmina spoke to Axel about the preparations for his journey to the baths, about a peasant who had broken his arm, about the large piece of ground mamma's vegetables took up; in short, she spoke of every thing so naturally, that the most quick-sighted observer of human nature, could not have discovered that her calmness was assumed.

The Major soon took his leave, and started the following morning on his journey to L—, where he arrived at his old lodgings at Goldsmith Hjertberg's on the afternoon of the 29th of June, after two days' uninterrupted shaking and jolting.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE INHERITED SIN.—THE FRUITS OF WESTERLIND'S OBSERVATIONS.

THE great heat added to the want of rest, had made the Major so unwell that he was obliged to resign the pleasure of seeing Augusta for a few days. In the mean time Westerlind was dispatched to announce the arrival of his master, and to make his excuses to the post-inspector for not personally paying his respects to him. When Westerlind came to the house with his message, he met Mrs. Von Spalden alone.

Every one knows, that even the best and most sensible women are not without their faults, whether they be inherited or acquired; and Mrs. Von Spalden could not be considered an exception. She was given to that besetting sin of her sex—curiosity. After some general preparatory questions about this and that, and after kindly offering him some refreshment, she soon got possession of the all-important secret which Westerlind fancied he had discovered. All this took place in such a way as not to compromise her dignity; at least, she herself was firmly convinced that her prying was managed most skillfully, and did much honor to her penetration, therefore, could by no means be unbecoming a lady of her station in life.

When the servant withdrew, her first care was to arrange her thoughts into something like order, then to reflect how and to what object she could best make use of the important news she had gathered. This was no easy matter to decide. Augusta's heart

must suffer. It could not be called a misfortune, on the contrary, but right that her eyes should be opened in reference to the Major's behavior.

"For," thought Mrs. Von Spalden, "if she is deceived in her hopes, pride will put to flight her romantic caprices, and then the heir will remain the conqueror."

The main point now was, whether she should let this blow come upon Augusta at once, or reserve it awhile, and make use of her news as auxiliary forces, when the expected bridegroom should make his grand attack upon the damsel's heart. Many were the reasons for and against these plans, which occurred to the good lady. She could not ask her husband's advice; for the post-inspector hated gossip; from this quarter, therefore, she was not likely to get a hint as to the best mode of proceeding.

The following morning arrived without her having come to any decision; but the oddest part of the business was, that Mrs. Von Spalden had not yet even told Augusta of Sterner's return; with this, however, she must be made acquainted; therefore she considered it her duty to inform Augusta of her discovery before she met Sterner.

"For," thought Mrs. Von Spalden, "if the world is not quite changed, she must crush those feelings which, after such news, she can no longer cherish without blushing for herself. I shall go!"

She entered her daughter's room with an air calculated to produce effect, full of earnestness and importance. At the same moment that Mrs. Von Spalden shut the door of this room, the door of the ante-chamber was opened and Sterner entered. He went toward Augusta's room, but arrested his steps as he heard the mother say, in a very curious tone of voice—

"Well, at last the Major has returned! Can you imagine, my child, what has detained him so long?"

"Never," said Sterner to himself, "have I condescended to listen; but this matter is of too great importance to me, and only relates to myself. I must know what follows."

After this praiseworthy determination he seated himself at a window, not far from the door, where he could distinctly hear every word that passed.

"Well, Augusta, why so quiet?" continued Mrs. Von Spalden; "perhaps you have some suspicion."

"No, dear mamma! I am thinking of him alone," said Augusta, in her sweet, calm, clear voice. "What did you say, mamma! what could have detained him?"

"Ah, my poor child!" said Mrs. Von Spalden, with maternal sympathy, "I scarcely dare tell you. Promise me, at least, to gather courage, so as to bear this new trial with firmness, and look upon it as a dispensation of the Lord."

"Oh, for mercy's sake, my dear mother!" exclaimed Augusta, in the utmost anxiety, "do not speak in riddles, make an end to this preamble; tell me at once, has any thing happened to him? is he ill?"

"He could not indeed have felt himself very well, when he arrived in town yesterday. At least so he sent his servant to say. But does not this appear to you very suspicious?"

"Suspicious! how so?" stammered Augusta.

"Oh, nothing more than that this illness may possibly be of a very peculiar nature; for example, if he has left a wounded heart in the place which he has just come from."

Sterner could scarcely breathe from anger and anxiety. He trembled at the impression which the mother's communications might produce; but to his indescribable joy and relief he heard Augusta reply with renewed confidence—

"Heaven be praised, that it is nothing else! you frightened me dreadfully, mamma. It is nothing but gossip!"

"Are you really so sure, my daughter? But I, your mother, tell you, that I know for a certainty that he is over head and ears in love with Miss Von Stalkrona. This damsel fell ill, and the Major was quite frantic. And if her indisposition had lasted to the end of eternity, he would not have started until he had seen and spoken to her again. She recovered, and doubtless the conversation took place the day before he left Sorby. They took a walk of some hours together. God knows what pretty things he said and heard on that occasion! But from that time forward he has lived as if in a dream."

Sterner listened with intense attention. Augusta's voice betrayed no signs of unusual emotion as she replied:

"How others choose to construe this event, I can not say, but for my part I do not see why he should be in love with the young lady because he was interested about her health when she became ill, and because he took a walk with her when she recovered."

"Augusta, my child, I have never before seen you so obstinate. Be as blind as you please, but know, that the whole neighborhood believes and thinks that he proposed to that beautiful girl."

"And even if the whole world thinks and says," replied Augusta, earnestly and decidedly, "that Sterner was on his knees from morning till night before Miss Von Stalkrona, still, I say, that it is not true. Let us drop this subject, dear mamma; for when once I firmly believe and am convinced of any thing my opinion never alters."

"O thou heavenly angel!" whispered the enchanted Major, "she who would captivate me, must be thus! Westerlind, you arrant knave, all this is your doing! I should dismiss you, but as your officiousness, instead

of doing harm has disclosed to me a trait in Augusta's character which surpasses all her other splendid qualities, I will say nothing about the matter this time."

After a short pause the mother's voice was again heard.

"Well, be as convinced as you please, it is all one to me; but tell me on what your conviction is founded?"

"Dear mamma, I have a sure and good foundation in the knowledge of Sterner's character. His heart is not changeable, and although it is true I can not quite understand the motives of his actions in certain respects, yet I believe that they are good. His looks, his tone of voice, his whole manner can not deceive. And this is why I am convinced that he does not love Miss Von Stalkrona."

Without answering a word, for she perceived that it would be useless, Mrs. Von Spalden left the room. She was most disagreeably surprised to find Sterner in the ante-chamber. A sweet smile was on his lips as he bowed to her.

"How annoying!" thought she; "he must surely have heard Augusta's weakness."

She received him with no small embarrassment, and said, coldly: "It is most pleasing and astonishing, Major, to see how gay and well you appear, when only yesterday you were so much indisposed."

"It was only in consequence of the fatigue of the journey, and the great heat," said Sterner. "I am perfectly well to-day, and really I can not see why one should not have a happy face when one has recovered from indisposition."

"Oh, yes, of course, I did not exactly mean that," stammered Mrs. Von Spalden, somewhat confused, for she did not know herself, much less could she express what she meant; for she was too much taken up with the thought that the Major might have heard how she had been prying into his private affairs—"It is provoking," added she, "that papa is not at home; but he will soon return, I hope."

"With your permission," answered Sterner, "I will pay my respects to your daughter."

The good lady would now willingly, of her own free will, have undertaken the disagreeable office which her husband had so shortly before imposed upon her; but as since then the post-inspector had given her perfectly contrary commands, she made a sort of half bow, and pointed to the room in which her daughter was, then hastened away to dispatch a messenger to the Burgomaster's house to make known to her lord and master the arrival of the Major. Sterner was not slow in taking the hint, and entered Augusta's sitting room.

She came toward him with a face beaming with joy. The first glance she cast on Sterner, convinced her that all that her

mother had been relating had been groundless gossip.

After Sterner had taken a glance through the door to discover if there was any listening ear in the ante-chamber, he stepped forward, took both Augusta's hands, pressed them cordially, and said:

"Can you forgive me; I have heard your conversation with your mother. Oh, Augusta, how I thank you for your trust; no! I can not deceive, I do not love Miss Von Stalkrona!"

"I know that," said Augusta, with the sweetest of smiles; "but why does report say so?"

"Probably, my servant's propensity for intriguing and gossiping is the origin of this annoying and groundless tale. During the young lady's illness I was often at Sorrbý Park, and it is certainly the truth, that I waited with anxiety the issue of that illness; as also that I remained there a few days longer than the time appointed, to see and speak to her again. All this, which sprang from very simple causes, Westerlind considered signs of love, and he has been so bold as to spread his suppositions."

After a short silence, Sterner continued: "I can not and will not deny, that I feel very great interest in Miss Von Stalkrona. I dare not yet disclose the reason why, because I have promised not, and moreover I am satisfied that it would not be right. Augusta can depend upon my word, that my feelings for Miss Von Stalkrona spring from great interest and respect, which no one who knows this noble and high-minded girl can refuse her."

The Major's rich full voice sounded so soft and sad, that it went to Augusta's heart.

"Poor Miss Von Stalkrona," sighed she. "I suspect that the pain which consumes her young life, is an enemy more difficult to be overcome than the most trying disease. Ah, if I knew her, what would I not do to make her happy!"

"That time will come, dear Augusta, when you are mistress of Sorrbý. Then you will, I know, bestow on her all the tender cares your warm and kind heart would suggest."

"If that time *should* come, of which you now speak, Major Sterner, my heart will be cold to the joys as well as the sorrows of life," said Augusta, shuddering at the fearful thought that her fate was so soon to be decided.

"Heaven defend us from such a misfortune," said Sterner, most gravely. "Your mind is strong, Miss Augusta; it will not fail when your firmness is most necessary; for you know from whom we have to seek strength. Do you still remember my words, when last we parted?"

"Ah yes, only too well; but there are times when my belief in your promises and assurances of protection from this fearful

misfortune which threatens me, is shaken by your extraordinary and inexplicable conduct."

"I admit," replied Sterner, "that my conduct may appear extraordinary. But should I be venturing too much were I to beg Augusta to ask herself, if my being so composed would not give her sufficient reason to suppose that there can hardly be any misfortune in store for her."

"Yes, you are always composed, always secure, always contented, Major Sterner," said Augusta, rather irritated; "but I do not know how far it would agree with the firmness of thought and strength of mind which you, I hope, do not deny to women, if one merely believes, blindly believes, without any examination, because a person who possesses one's esteem and confidence has said '*believe!*' No, Major Sterner, it is not so with me; I am like other human beings who feel and suffer because they live in the cold land of reality, and not in that misty region formed by the diseased and enthusiastic fancy. Joy and sorrow are by no means the same to me. I am no such heroine as voluntarily to stretch out my hands to the chains only for the childish pleasure of showing that I have the strength to bear them, and then have the courage, of my own accord to command every feeling which nature has planted in my soul."

"Oh Augusta!" said Sterner, in a soft reproachful voice, "is it possible that you should so mistake me?—Do you then consider me a mad enthusiast?—Is it necessary that the highest joys of life and its bitterest sorrows should be alike to me, because I strive to attain something which I hold at least as a duty to myself? I can not now explain myself, be the consequences what they may; but know, from the moment you doubt the purity and truth of my feelings and principles, the holy tie of confidence is severed, and—what is once disjoined can never be united as before. You have deeply grieved and mortified me."

Augusta raised her eyes and beheld the proud lofty form of the Major standing before her, so as indeed to command respect. His whole appearance bespoke pain and displeasure, heightened by emotion, suppressed by great self-command: his eyes were thoughtfully fixed upon the ground.

Augusta was right in what she said, and, possibly, would have defended her cause against any other, perhaps even against her father himself; but gone, vanished were all her high ideas of firmness at this single glance; they were forced into the back-ground by one powerful feeling, and that one—was love!

To have offended Sterner, to have incurred his displeasure, was something which so far exceeded every other grief, that Augusta felt she had never suffered so much as in those few seconds. She was as pale as death; her little hands lay clasped on her lap, and large tears, the bitterest she had ever shed rolled

slowly down her cheeks; she dared not look up, and no word escaped her closely compressed lips: thus passed a long painful minute. Then Sterner's eyes sought hers, and his heart beat with joy and remorse when he beheld her sitting there, the picture of the deepest repentance—a lovely Magdalene!

"Augusta—dear Augusta!" whispered the voice, which to her was the united harmony of all heavenly and earthly music, "do not be so distressed. I am quickly reconciled; I see that it was but an instant's distrust; I know and believe that you would not hurt my feelings!"

"Oh, no, no! far be it from me!" said she, in a voice trembling with emotion. "Believe me, I would rather die! yes, I would even rather unite myself to the hateful heir himself, if you desired it, than have incurred your displeasure."

So saying, she looked so beseechingly into his face, that the Major required all his self-command not to press the beloved girl to his violently-beating heart; but he could never have forgiven himself for such an act in the present state of affairs. Struggling with numerous and various feelings, he bent down to her and said, fervently:

"I believe you, Augusta! you are twice as dear to me, and twice as sacred for your innocent acknowledgment! The Lord be with you! We shall not see each other again until I come with my cousin; for I am only a mortal, and such hours as these must not be repeated—farewell!" He pressed her hand to his lips and hastened away.

His meeting the post-inspector upon the stairs had the effect of a cooling draught upon him; but as the post-inspector had no intention of imparting to the Major the unheard-of plans for the entertainment in honor of his future son-in-law, Sterner easily got off his host's hospitable invitation to remain.

Sterner kept his word; he did not visit Augusta again during his stay in L—, and started on the 3d of July, on his journey to Helsinborg, accompanied by the post-inspector's warmest wishes, and after he had renewed his promise to dispatch a messenger with the news of the exact day and hour on which the long-expected guest would arrive.

CHAPTER XL.

WEAKNESS AND STRENGTH.

A FEW hours after the Major had left Sorrbj, a man on horseback was seen galloping at full speed along the road to C—.

On Wilhelmina being informed of Sterner's approaching, and to her unexpected departure, and during the trying explanation which had followed so immediately after.

she had exerted all her strength to assume an outward appearance of calmness; but this was far more than her delicate state of health could bear. With the departure of the beloved object, the difficult task she had imposed upon herself was at an end; and when Axel came and announced, with a slight sigh, that a cloud of dust was all the traces that remained of their dear neighbor, the tender lily bent instantly. In great alarm they all rushed to the fainting girl, but their endeavors to bring her back to her senses were fruitless; her grief had been too intense—her exertion too great.

Axel threw himself on horseback in the utmost anxiety; he insisted on going himself to C——, to fetch the doctor. After an absence of about eight-and-twenty hours he returned with him. Wilhelmina's condition was scarcely at all improved, and the anxiety of the family was fearful.

After Dr. Sommer had heard all the circumstances, and had visited the invalid, he quieted the afflicted parents with the assurance that there was no great danger, that all proceeded from exhaustion and nervousness, the natural consequences of going too soon into the fresh air, and taking perhaps too long a walk: this exertion, the doctor assured them, had been injurious to one so recently recovered, and was contrary to his express directions.

The doctor was, of course, neither omniscient nor omnipotent; nevertheless, what he said was taken for gospel. The young lady was nervous, and must be treated accordingly. Soon after she opened her eyes, but they were dull and inanimate. They wandered about as if seeking some object, which, not finding, they closed again. A sorrow, too deep and too bitter to be imparted to any one, wrung her heart; and broken sighs alone trembled like spirits' whispers upon her lips, which were as pale as death. Although perfectly sensible, for two whole days she uttered not a word. Patient as a good child, she allowed herself to be treated as such; but showed the most perfect indifference to all that went on around her. The doctor shook his head; he could not prescribe for a malady which he could not satisfactorily explain.

"Hein, hein!" said he, "no improvement can be expected until this melancholy has passed off. You must try by some means or other to divert her benumbed and relaxed faculties, and bring her blood into active circulation, or else I can not answer for her life."

With these consoling words the doctor stepped into his carriage, regretted that his time was so fully occupied, cautiously felt in his waistcoat-pocket to make sure that he had got the little paper the Colonel had given him on taking leave, and, finding that all was right, he hastily raised his hat, and, while "your obedient servant" was yet hovering on his

lips, crack went the whip, and the doctor disappeared.

Axel and Aurora returned disheartened to the invalid: a long anxious hour had passed; Axel now sat alone at her bedside. Suddenly he remembered that he had a book in his pocket, which he had borrowed from Sterner before his departure. As he drew it forth, intending to divert his thoughts by reading, a bouquet of carnations and hyacinths fell to the ground.

"Ah!" exclaimed he, "I have the Major's flowers." He took them up and turned to Mina. "See, dear Mina; a few days ago these were as fresh and blooming as her for whom they were intended. They seem to fade and droop their heads in sadness, because yours is bowed down. Our kind Sterner sent them to you as a small mark of his esteem."

"What!" cried she, passionately, as a burning blush diffused her pale cheeks. "Give them to me, Axel!" She snatched the faded flowers from his hand, and contemplated them awhile, with such emotion, that Axel trembled to interpret it. Then, casting them far from her, she sank, weeping, on her brother's breast, who, in great grief, stretched out his arms to her. To weep was a sweet consolation, of which Wilhelmina had long been deprived. To be able to communicate with a friend who could feel for and sympathize with her. "Are we alone, Axel?" whispered she, glancing timidly round.

"Yes, we are, my poor sister! I alone am present, and that High Witness of all our actions and feelings, who also sees what is now passing in your heart."

"Oh! Axel, I am very, very unhappy," sighed she; "but even you should not have known the cause of my grief, had not this trifling occurrence awakened your suspicions. However, this does not cause me any uneasiness; I know you too well to fear that you would misuse my unfortunate secret."

"Rely upon me; I will never betray you, my poor Wilhelmina. But, say, have perfect confidence in me. Has Sterner given you any cause to—"

"Oh, hush, hush!" exclaimed Wilhelmina, in much agitation, laying her hand upon his lips. "For some time past I have been living upon mere delusions—he is quite innocent of it—"

"But," began Axel again, "are you sure that you have deceived yourself: and how did you arrive at this certainty? Does the Major know what you have just disclosed to me?"

"I can not doubt it," replied Wilhelmina, blushing deeply; "his conduct bespeaks his conviction; but you shall judge for yourself."

She then related to him every circumstance, from the very beginning of their acquaintance: the midnight adventure; his

anxiety at her illness; and, lastly, that all-important conversation, the evening before his departure.

"Yes, yes! it is only too certain," she concluded, in a melancholy tone; "but his behavior toward me was noble. And I, a poor weak girl, how could I hear and answer all this? But I possess his unlimited esteem—I know that—and I will be contented with it; yet—

"The joys of life are quenched for me,
But gloomy darkness round I see."

Axel had listened to his sister's narration in silence. When she concluded he said, kindly, trying to console her—

"Ah, Wilhelmina, do not speak thus; you grieve me deeply. Your young life can bloom again. Love for such a man as Sterner does not destroy, but rather ennoble, the mind. You must struggle to conquer, to exalt your soul to his. And, proud in the consciousness of his esteem and your own power, your young heart will be inspired with new fresh life. In this case, resignation is your duty; and I am sure that my sweet, high-minded Wilhelmina can never forget that she has many other holy ties, and that there are many hearts who claim her love."

As Axel spoke, a soft, saint-like calmness seemed to spread over the damsel's beautiful features.

"Many thanks, my dear brother," said she, in a low but firm voice; "you shall not have exhorted me in vain. Ah, what a new rich pleasure it is for me to hear you speak with so much feeling and energy; yes, almost as if you were inspired! Do not deny that Sterner has also had great influence over you?"

"I do not deny it, nor am I ashamed of it; for I admire his principles and his conduct. He is truly a noble, high-minded man, of cultivated and extensive knowledge. But, to show you that I am guided by my own judgment, I will confide to you that the Major is in the highest degree something, of which he himself has not the slightest suspicion, namely, an *enthusiast*, but only in one particular; I mean in every thing that regards matrimonial alliances. This subject, which I picture to myself with a thousand charming little variations, has for him only three; these are, love, confidence, and constancy. These he unites into one single chord—peace; and therein he includes all the bliss which he would have locked in two human hearts. Ah, what do you say, dear Mina," continued Axel, falling into his usual sportive train, "what do you think would happen if that chord were to have one single, only one single false note; then good-night forever to our Major's welfare and happiness! No, no, it is all nonsense! The Lord be thanked, I am not in the slightest degree imaginative."

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Wilhelmina smiled sweetly.

"But, good Axel, you—"

"Do not understand such matters, you would say, my little sister," said Axel, interrupting her; "but all is not joking; and by my honor! Sterner has too exaggerated an idea of marriage, that is certain. She who will gain and keep his heart, must pass through trials which, possibly, the best of women could not undergo. In short, he expects, what is not to be found in this mortal world, an angel in a maiden's form. If he be happy, it will entirely be by accident; or Fate, with unusual kindness, must cast in his way a superhuman being, formed after his vastly exalted and peculiar taste."

"Your remarks are not without justice, Axel, but if you had seen the picture of that angel, you would have been astonished. She was more captivating than beautiful; I never saw a countenance which expressed so much nobleness, purity, and goodness."

"Well, well, God grant that it may be so!" said Axel; "no one can wish more than I that he may be happy, and see his dreams realized. I should be very glad to behold with my own eyes that extraordinary being. But you deserve, also, my sweet sister, to pluck the roses of life, as well as its thorns. You must divert your mind from these painful recollections: what do you say to a journey to the bathing place of—?"

"That I must decidedly beg to be excused," smiled Wilhelmina. "Quiet and solitary meditation, personally, or in writing, to communicate with you, is all that I wish. But, as you have brought me to the subject, let me ask you, Axel, how will it be with your peace, if you have such constant opportunity of seeing Henrietta Stolzenbeck?"

"Oh, that will be all right," said Axel, gayly. "Then, I have been appointed her incognito guardian while there, and I intend strictly to fulfill my duty. I no longer have any tender feeling toward her; you know that my heart is very capacious. Many amiable damsels have dwelt there, and, at my command, have departed, to give place to another. Miss Stolzenbeck had very nearly taken possession of a whole floor; I had to give her a speedy dismissal when it came to my ears that there was some obstacles to the validity of the hiring contract. I am not at all sorry to have the above-named floor free, and I don't doubt I shall let it during the approaching season at the baths."

"Thoughtless Axel!" said Wilhelmina, reproachfully; "I well knew that you could not long be as elevated as Sterner. Now you are quite yourself again, and my joy is over."

"Think no more of him," besought Axel; "but try to turn again to your humble servant, who is now about to hasten to bring home a victim from the forest, and lay it at your feet. For you must know that I have borrowed the Major's hounds, and with these,

added to mine, you can imagine what a splendid hunting retinue I can have. Farewell, my dear girl!"

He threw his beloved sister a kiss, and hastened to his favorite sport, whistling an air out of the "Freischütz."

When Aurora returned, she was agreeably surprised to find so visible a change in Wilhelmina. From this day forward the statue began to be animated; she soon rose, then began to go out; but she never crossed the bridge. After Axel's departure to the watering-place, she became more grave and reserved, but still went on quietly; and, although for a long time she retained a sickly paleness, still she had recovered her health. If possible she was more charming than ever; for she was kinder, more benevolent, to every one. But happiness was of short duration at Sorby Park. The Stålkrona family received a visit from a guest who generally makes terrible inroads on the peace of those he has visited, and leaves behind him sad recollections. But we must turn to another scene of action, where the post-inspector was restlessly endeavoring to arrange the *fête* in honor of the heir, with all the brilliancy which the occasion required.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE ARRIVAL OF THE HEIR.

As the town clock of L— struck half past five, a considerable crowd of common people was seen hastening to the west end of the principal street. Curious faces peeped out from every door and every window, and in the distance was heard the rumbling sound of a slowly approaching carriage. Every neck was stretched half a yard over the window-sills, so as to catch a glimpse of the expected grandees. At length an open landau, drawn by three horses, appeared in sight. On the left sat a young man in civilian's clothes. His bronzed complexion distinctly showed the effects of a more warm climate. His features were lively and agreeable, and light brown locks shaded his high brow. His large sparkling blue eyes (which contrasted oddly with his dark skin) gazed through a pair of spectacles at the gaping crowd, with rather more of a roguish look than with dignity. At his right sat Major Sterner; his features were gloomy, his air proud and serious. He eagerly watched his traveling companion, who by turns leant gayly forward to look at the damsels at the windows, then turned to Sterner with some question, which he, quite inattentive, did not seem to hear, or really did not hear, from the noise of the carriage, or absence of mind. The post-inspector's house was situated at the end of the street, near the market place. It was surrounded by a

crowd of people, which is often the case in small towns, when there is any thing unusual to happen or arrive. It was with difficulty the traveling carriage could move forward; but suddenly the tall thin figure of the post-inspector appeared on the top landing of the stone steps.

"Make room, my friends! make room!" cried he, waving his pocket-handkerchief in the air. All modestly moved aside, and as many as they would hold rushed to the steps of the neighbors' houses, and the road was left free. The carriage stopped. Westerland and another servant sprang quickly from the box. The one flung open the carriage-door, while the other let down the steps, and with a few bounds the gentlemen were in the passage, where Mr. Von Spalden, hat in hand, and with a peculiarly solemn air, kept bowing in respectful silence, until the introduction took place in a room on the ground floor, in which the travelers were also to put themselves to rights.

"Gentlemen," said the Major, "permit me to introduce you to each other. 'The post-inspector, Von Spalden!—Mr. Constantine Sterner, my cousin!'" Then followed bows, embraces, and kisses on the cheek, all in the old style.

"I have, at last, the pleasure," began the post-inspector, "of seeing a welcome and long expected guest in my house! permit me to assure you, my worthy Mr. Sterner, that the will and the choice of my honored brother have my entire approbation, as your proxy can testify. It is my wish, it is—it is—my hope and—my—my—joyful expectation, that—you will agree with me in this."

During this short, modest speech of the post-inspector, the young gentleman had stationed himself before the glass, where he began, with a certain elegant off-hand manner, to arrange his toilet, and his beautiful locks.

"That is not quite decided," said he with a slight smile. "With your permission, Mr. Von Spalden, my satisfaction does not depend on your approbation alone, but also on that of your daughter. We shall continue this subject when I have seen and spoken to her; but now you must excuse me, for I require a quarter of an hour for my toilet." Then not waiting for an answer, he flung up the window and cried out—"Waller—Westerland! my boxes; bestir yourselves you rascals! Pardon me, Mr. Von Spalden, I shall be ready immediately. O, *mon Dieu!* what warmth, what heat, one can scarcely breathe here. Heavens, this abominable habit of always keeping the windows closed!"

The post-inspector drew back with a look of annoyance. The Major, who had been giving some directions outside, had not heard what had been passing, but as he saw his host open the door with such a look of annoyance, and glide slowly past him on the

stairs, he tapped him gayly upon the shoulder and asked:

"Well, how does he please you?"

"Hem, hem!" said the post-inspector, shaking his head, then half whispering, he added, "the gentleman is cursedly free and easy. It promises nothing good, Major. He accosts me, his future father-in-law, I should say, with a freedom, yes, almost indifference, which is highly offensive, and to my thinking, was quite uncalled for."

"You must have a little patience with him," said the Major, trying to soften him, "this frankness is his habit; but when you are better acquainted with each other, I hope all will go well!"

"The Lord grant it," sighed the post-inspector, "I have sad misgivings; but excuse me, I am detaining you, Major Sterner; you must also wish to free yourself of the dust a little. I shall return in a quarter of an hour to fetch you both."

In the mean time Mr. Von Spalden paced up and down his own room; he did not wish the guests who were assembled in the drawing-room to see him thus, for he considered himself too deeply humbled, and feared his features had not yet resumed their usual solemnity. He held his watch in his hand, and every time that he marched through the room examined it again. This quarter of an hour appeared to him an age: he held the watch to his ear to assure himself that it was going, and at the same time gave vent to his impatience.

"I wish the youngster and the will to the devil, and the festivities to boot."

At length the quarter of an hour had expired. To be more sure he waited yet one minute longer, then with hesitating steps entered the heir's room at last. But he had very nearly choked with anger when he found his future son-in-law in his dressing-gown, sitting in the most uncereemonious and comfortable manner before a table, literally covered with all the small and large articles of luxury which fashion has invented for a *distingué* toilet. He was then just engaged in arranging his small mustache into its proper shape, with a little silver comb made particularly for that purpose. The Major, who was perfectly ready, stood in the middle of the room, brushing and arranging his hair, while he exhorted his cousin to make haste.

"Permit me to remark, gentlemen," said the post-inspector, with suppressed anger, "that the company awaits you."

"Ah, you have company, Mr. Von Spalden! so that is very agreeable! that is a surprise; I did not know—Westerlind, bring here the yellow waistcoat. It is now somewhat cooler in the room, Mr. Von Spalden—Waller, the rose-scented oil—there, the bottle to the left. But first the extract for the beard. Pardon me, cousin Alexander, but might I trouble you to undo that green

morocco case and hand me some breast-pins? Choose yourself! Ah, my worthy post-inspector, I swear to you by my youth, that I shall be entirely at your disposal in a quarter of an hour if that will suit you."

Silently the poor, tormented man betook himself back to his room, and with his watch in his hand returned to his marching up and down; but his step became more and more heavy, while his lips, from constantly biting them in his impatience, trembled more and more violently, when a soft knocking was heard at the door—

"Who is there?" roared the post-inspector in a voice of thunder.

"It is I, husband," whispered Mrs. Von Spalden's sweet, timid voice; "where is the heir, my dear? The guests are beginning to get impatient, the lamps will go out, and the child, whom we have hired for the cherub, will no longer sit still upon the altar."

"Go to the devil along with your guests, lamps, and cherubs," roared the post-inspector; "he must have time to change his dress."

Immediately after saying this he opened the door and added:

"Rigitza, we shall come in two minutes; let all be in proper order, or—fear for the consequences."

Poor, trembling Mrs. Von Spalden hastened back to the drawing-room to do the honors. Then she cast a glance down the mysterious passage, again overlooking every thing, and handing *bonbons* to the cherub that he might remain quiet.

All things have an end in this world, and so it was at last with this slow quarter of an hour. A great noise on the stairs announced that the important moment had come. The company drew somewhat back so as to allow the strangers to have a good view.

Mr. Von Spalden opened the door to the corridor, and led his guests in, who to their great astonishment found themselves ushered into a place blazing with lights. They passed through an ingenious alley, formed of twelve high arches, covered with foliage and entwined with garlands of flowers. Each arch was illuminated in the most fanciful and tasteful manner. On each of the pillars which stood between the arches hung a chandelier, sparkling in a thousand colors between the surrounding foliage. Astonished at this unexpected splendor, and blinded by the strong light, the stranger held his hand before his eyes; but the post-inspector who had never taken his eyes from the cherub in the background observed his impatience, and fearing some disagreeable interruption he offered his arm to his guest and drew him toward the last arch, above which was written in large letters of gold:

"THE 12TH JULY, 1835.

DEDICATED TO
CONSTANTINE STERNER."

Here also was raised a sort of altar of foliage and moss, upon which stood a little cherub in a charming position, looking, in his dress of white gauze and silver paper, as celestial and aerial as any earthly being could possibly do. He held in one hand a torch, which doubtless was meant to represent Cupid's torch, and in the other a wreath of the most beautiful and choice flowers. But as he, for whom all these festivities were in honor, drew near and said, with a polite smile:

"Oh, Mr. Von Spalden, how much trouble you have taken! I am dumb with astonishment."

The angel grew furious, flung the wreath in the heir's face and screamed lustily.

"Take that for having kept me waiting so long."

So saying, he waved his torch so violently, that it came in contact with his wings; immediately the angel began to shriek, and to merge into a stream of light. The wings were on fire! The Major, who, until now had been only a silent spectator, hastened forward, and while the post-inspector was inwardly wishing the naughty boy to the infernal regions, he tore off the whole angelic costume, and set the youngster safe and sound upon the ground; who, casting a frowning, threatening look upon the stranger, sprang into the nearest room.

"Well, one can truly say, my honored host, that this is an ingenious surprise," said the heir, smiling. "Words fail me to express my acknowledgment for all the trouble you must have given yourself."

"Oh, I pray you," said the post-inspector, softened, "It is not worth speaking of. Permit me now to conduct you into the saloon."

He was received at the door by the hostess. "My wife, Mr. Sterner! our future son-in-law, Rigitz!"

After a few obliging words were exchanged, the stranger was led through a long row of bowing and scraping guests, who were introduced according to their ranks, which the post-inspector had all in his mind's eye. At length they had reached the top of the room. Mr. Von Spalden cast a look full of meaning round.

"Where is Augusta, mamma?" asked he, in a voice which was meant to be good-natured; but which made the good woman's blood freeze.

"She has just gone to her room, my dear," answered the wife; "she will return immediately."

"I will fetch Miss Von Spalden, with your permission," said the Major. "It is proper that my cousin should receive her from the hands of his proxy."

"Much obliged," replied the post-inspector. "The sooner the better," added he, waving his hand graciously.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE BETROTHED.

STERNER entered Augusta's room. She had retreated into the furthest corner, and was engaged bathing her beautiful eyes with cold water; but notwithstanding this, her tears continued to flow. When she saw the Major, she rose from the talouret on which she was sitting, took a few steps toward him, then involuntarily stood still. She said nothing; but her attitude expressed her thoughts: she stretched out her hands in a most beseeching manner to him.

For one moment, Sterner stood lost in silent admiration and astonishment! If one could fancy a union of celestial and earthly life in a material being, it was to be found in these lovely and faultless features. She was inexpressibly beautiful. Her tasteful dress heightened, if possible, the brilliancy of her personal charms. A violet silk dress encircled her slender form in rich folds. The dazzling neck put to shame a fine collar of real Brabant lace, which was intended to ornament it. Flowing ringlets shaded her brow of whiteness; and her cheeks were deeply flushed, but it was not with pleasure. Her heart beat violently when she saw Sterner's great emotion. "O God," thought she, "will he not, or can he not save me!" but the Major stepped forward, and contemplated her with a look beaming with most unbounded love. He respectfully bent his knee and said, as if he had divined the thoughts of her heart: "Augusta, forgive me! I can not act otherwise. The happiness of my lifetime—your own happiness. Augusta, depend upon these moments. If my fervent prayers are of any value to you, come with me, and be firm."

She bent her head in sign of acquiescence, and whispered scarcely audibly: "I will, I shall!" But the utmost grief was painted on her features. Sterner rose, placed her arm in his, and led her into the saloon, where all the guests, arranged in a circle, and punch-glasses in hand, awaited her arrival. Augusta saw nothing of what was going forward.

The post-inspector conducted the future bridegroom to her.

"Augusta, my child! look up; here stands your future bridegroom! your bride to be, Mr. Sterner!"

The Major then gave her hand, which he still held, to his cousin, who pressed it ardently to his lips.

"My beautiful *fiancée*," lisped he, "I now for the first time feel the full value of your uncle's will." As he saw that she trembled and grew pale, he led her to a seat; and after the toast was drank to the betrothed, he returned thanks very gracefully in his own and his *fiancée's* name. The Major had retreated into a side-room, and the post-

inspector gave the musicians a sign that they were to begin.

"May I be so happy?" whispered the younger Sterner, putting his arm round the damsel's waist. She was silent, but allowed herself to be whirled away in a quick waltz; the Major stood gloomily leaning against the door-way. At the close of the dance, young Sterner endeavored to engage his *fiancée* in conversation; but she answered in monosyllables, although kindly; and he appeared tolerably vexed at the small return he got for his trouble.

"I fancy that the second tour belongs to the proxy," said the post-inspector, with a smile which seemed somewhat uncommon on the worthy man's lips, but he had never been so excited since his younger days as he was this evening.

The Major bowed silently, took Augusta's hand, and whispered some words of consolation to her, while the others were arranging the quadrille. Ah, how happy she was now! how easily and elegantly Sterner danced! how light and captivating were all his movements! They mutually admired each other without venturing to say so. The remainder of the evening passed in old-fashioned ceremonies—like most evenings of this kind. Dancing and playing, dull and lively conversation, the steam of hot punch, bishop, and mulled wine, mingled with the smoke which came pouring in from the adjoining rooms; for the elderly gentlemen could not possibly be deprived of this pleasure. Toasts and cheers, prose and verse, ice and confectionary, dwindling lights, heat and dust, all went on in gay confusion, until supper was at length announced.

On taking leave, the heir asked his betrothed if he might be allowed to have a little conversation with her alone on the following morning. She consented with pleasure, as it seemed. Augusta hoped that if she could only speak to the gay young man alone, she might, perhaps, be able to work upon his better feelings, for he did not look as if he were capable of any grief of the heart.

The post-inspector had asked his future son-in-law to stay at his house, and he had consented; but our friend, the Major, returned to his old lodging at Hjertberg's.

The guests were gone, the family alone; Mrs. Von Spalden, like a good housekeeper, went gathering all the stray tea-spoons and glasses. The post-inspector extinguished the lamps, one after the other, with his own hand, and Augusta arranged the chess-men: all were silent. The dear papa now coughed, laid down the snuffers, and said, graciously—

"Well, my little girl, is not your betrothed a handsome man? You are to be envied, my child, believe me you are. In all the course of my life I never heard of such luck as yours. It is true, he is a little too—too

frank in certain matters—not attentive enough where he should be; but all young people are so, with very few exceptions; they think they have the privilege of conducting themselves, after a journey, as they please. Well, well! youth wants discretion—that will come with age; and sixty thousand marks, Hamburger Banko, make, by my honor, a nice little fortune in our days; therefore, I think all will go well. Did you not find an astonishing likeness, Augusta, between him and the Lieutenant, who almost turned my head a few months ago?"

"Yes, papa, the family likeness is really very great; but our present guest has a much darker complexion, and wears spectacles, which disfigures him. Lieutenant Sterner was better looking, and, upon the whole, was more like the portrait than this one."

"Well, yes; but it little signifies to us," replied the post-inspector, "if he is more or less like the portrait, since we have, at last, got hold of the right one. But, my child, you ought not to be so imprudent in thought, much less express it, as to admit that any one is better-looking than your intended. But how is it, does he not desire a little conversation with you alone to-morrow morning? I hope you have granted it?"

"Yes, father."

"That is right, my child," replied the post-inspector, patting her on her blushing cheek. "You have already to-day given me one proof of your obedience, in dressing yourself according to my wish, and not after your own simple taste. Thus you made, as I foresaw, an impression upon your unknown friend: he is quite charmed, you may be sure of that."

"Dear papa," besought Augusta, unspeakably annoyed at her worthy father's condescending talkativeness, "allow me to go to my room, I require rest."

"Go, my child; the Lord be with you! Formerly it never used to occur to you to ask such a permission until you had helped your mother in her occupations; but it is not unbecoming to you to play the great lady."

"Oh, do not speak thus!" said Augusta, bursting into tears. "It is your wish, papa, that—"

"Come, come, I was only in fun! I was only joking you a little—good-night!"

Augusta kissed her parent's hand, and betook herself to her beloved *sanctum sanctorum*.

At eleven o'clock on the following morning, Augusta stood alone at the drawing-room window, gazing up at the cloudy heavens, which appeared to her like a picture of herself, when Constantine Sterner entered.

"I am extremely obliged to you, dear Miss Von Spalden," said he in the sweetest of tones, while he led her to a sofa and seat-

ed himself by her side. "The whole night long I have dreamt of my lovely *fiancée* alone; and may I also hope that you, if only for the space of a moment, have devoted your thoughts to me?" He kissed her hand in a manner which, along with his voice and looks, expressed the most perfect gallantry.

"I have thought a great deal of you, Mr. Sterner," replied Augusta, earnestly; "I have almost longed for this hour; for I hope you will permit me to speak sincerely to you."

"Certainly," replied he; "but excuse my boldness! Your manner, your voice, give very little hope that this communication will be an agreeable one for me. In this case, would it not be perhaps better if I begged to decline the honor of your confidence?"

"Oh! do not say so, Mr. Sterner!" exclaimed Augusta, softly; "it would be better for us both, if I might speak."

"Well, as you command, dear lady! only defer it a few moments. Permit me to tell you why I begged for the honor of a private interview. You know what has brought me here; let me now merely say, that I could not have seen so much beauty and natural grace without my heart being captivated by it. If I had become acquainted with Augusta Von Spalden earlier, on her my choice would have fallen among thousands, and I would willingly have renounced the whole inheritance to have possessed her, in case another young lady had been named in the will. Now the matter is just the reverse; my happiness depends upon your decision; but far from asserting a certain claim to your hand, I do not demand it if your heart does not willingly accompany it. If I am so unfortunate as to be refused, the half of the property shall belong to you; but, Miss Von Spalden, do not cast away my heart, my life, my fervent love, as though they were worthless!—I will give you as much time as you desire to decide my fate!"

"I thank you for your noble and candid explanation, Mr. Sterner," said Augusta, somewhat quieted by this promising beginning. "A man of your way of thinking must naturally gain my esteem and good wishes; but you have a right to expect more, and yet—yet—excuse my sincerity, I can offer you nothing more, neither now nor after years of consideration; for my heart is no longer my own, and it would certainly break if I joined my fate to any other than to his, whom—"

"If this be the case, Miss Von Spalden," answered Sterner, with suppressed anger, "I really do not know what I have to do here, or what was the use of all that foolery of yesterday. Might I ask why you did not acquaint my proxy with this pleasant news?"

"I thought," stammered Augusta, as she raised her handkerchief before her glowing face, "that he was not quite ignorant of it."

"Well, I must admit that it is very odd. I am written to, that I am extremely welcome, that I have permission to try my fortune with you, that the parents give their consent, &c.; when I arrive, I am received at a *fête* given in honor of me, when the engagement is openly announced; and after all this, you are so good as to inform me, that you had fixed your choice on another long ago! In truth Miss Von Spalden, this is a game which no man of honor can admire. Perhaps you will explain to me the reason why you have thus chosen for the subject of it, a person who, as entirely unknown to you, can scarcely have deserved your contempt and this insult?"

"I am grieved to be obliged to confess to you, Mr. Sterner, that the despotism my father exercises in his house is the cause of all this embarrassment. I dared not oppose your coming here. The inclination of my heart is unknown to my father, for he is deaf to entreaties and tears. But rest assured; that, although in vain, I tried all that reason, duty, and feeling could say, to prevent him from openly publishing our engagement before I had spoken to you—"

The young man promenaded the room with quick steps. His eyebrows were strongly contracted, and his cheeks glowed with the blush of anger.

"It is, indeed, a very excellent romance," said he, smiling ironically. "It is only a pity, Miss Von Spalden, that I am of too prosaic a disposition to enjoy the poetical beauties which you doubtless find in it. Moreover, I must admire the heroic resignation with which you, yesterday, so admirably played the part of the betrothed, of the bashful *fiancée*, all the while making a fool of poor me. Oh, it is abominable, thus to dissemble. If you could not have got accustomed to me, could not have loved me, and found after mature trial that our hearts were not suited for each other, I should have withdrawn—it is true with sorrow—but still with increased respect; for no one can command the feelings of the heart. But to allow me to travel here, inspired with hopes, which you never intended to realize—to be hissed at as a ridiculous fool by all your circle—all this is something, which so much surpasses what has hitherto been considered a disgrace, that I must immediately call your father to account for it."

"Oh, do not, for mercy's sake, Mr. Sterner!" exclaimed Augusta, in fearful anxiety. "All my father's anger would fall upon me, if he found his hopes crushed by me. Oh, do not go yet, at least! Oh, do not be so cruel," she added, as Sterner laid his hand on the door-handle, in a decided manner.

"But what do you really want?" asked he loitering. "You will never be my wife, and yet permit yourself to pass for my betrothed to the world!"

Augusta burst into tears, her emotion and grief were too great, for some moments, for her to be able to express them in words.

"This is really too annoying," said the young man, with a slight tinge of impatience. "The sooner the matter is decided the better for us both. I shall give your father back his ridiculous promise; for I will not be made a fool of to be brought here just for your pleasure."

"God knows what sort of a pleasure it was to me," sighed Augusta; "but you can easily understand my torment. I trembled to enrage my severe father, and therefore I preferred to throw myself on your generosity and goodness of heart. Oh, let it not be in vain! You could so easily find a reason for breaking off, if you would; and in such a way, too, as would—"

"As would cast a stain upon my honor," said Sterner, interrupting her. "Truly, Miss Von Spalden, you favor me with a confidence which I am not in a position to return. As you have read the will, you must perceive that no such ground can exist on my side. My honor, and the last wish of the departed, are binding on me: you, on the contrary, are at liberty to refuse the offer, if you think fit. However," added he, rather more mildly, when he saw how dreadfully Augusta suffered at his cold and unsparing tone, "I will consider, if there be any pretext to make your wish agree with my honor, in which case I could adopt it. And, however little I can reckon upon the issue of my visit, yet I shall not misuse your confidence."

"The Lord bless you for this comfort," said Augusta, fervently; "I shall always esteem you a true and dear friend, who is worthy of respect and confidence. Your noble heart will forgive me that I can be nothing more to you."

She accompanied her guest to the door, and looked him in the face so beseechingly and eloquently, that he said, smiling:

"I shall do what I can, but—do not be too sure."

CHAPTER XLIII.

NEWS FROM THE BATHS OF —.

A FORTNIGHT had passed since the guest, dreaded by some and longed for by others, had arrived at the Von Spaldens' house; but he did not seem yet to have found any opportunity of accomplishing Augusta's wishes, or perhaps he would not. On the contrary, his attentions became more and more pressing. He took enormous pains to win, at least, her pity and interest, by the most delicate flattery and the most fervent assurances of his increasing burning love: but Augusta felt neither the one nor the other for him. Often, when they were speaking together

alone—for the *futur* had her father's permission to visit her when he pleased—Augusta reproached him for not having the smallest regard for her grief, and for not fulfilling his promise.

"But are you not asking too much, dearest Augusta," answered he; "for you are destined to be my wife? You have not yet expressed yourself in your father's presence, and yet you expect that I should work against my own happiness. Besides, it is entirely impossible that what your uncle has fixed should be broken on my side. If our union is to be dissolved, it must be done by you."

"Oh! Mr. Sterner, you have little generosity, if you can reconcile yourself to see a girl, who never can nor will love you, dragged like a victim to the altar. You little resemble your cousin!"

"And yet, who knows," said he, and a scornful smile played round his fresh lips, "which of us is the greatest victim."

"What do you mean?" stammered Augusta, turning pale.

"Oh nothing, on my honor! Let us change the subject; but allow me to express to you my astonishment, that one never sees him, whom you have honored with the precious gift of your heart. Why does he not step forward and claim his right; no motive, be that of whatever nature it may, should prevent him from coming forward as the guardian of such precious rights."

If the speaker had plunged a dagger into poor tormented Augusta's heart, the pain could not have been greater than she now suffered. Oh, how bitter it was to be forced to hear this, and yet not to dare to defend him, who was a thousand times dearer to her than her own life! but she would not name him; however, Hope whispered to her—"He will not leave you, he can not—he will soon step forward to save your happiness!" But with every sun that set without bringing any change, this hope grew more faint. The Major's visits became less frequent, and the attentions of the bridegroom more and more pressing. They even began to speak of the bans and the wedding.

The younger Sterner expressed a wish to the post-inspector that the marriage might be celebrated about the middle of September, and assured his betrothed that her romantic whims would pass off when she was in the beautiful Sorrbý as a young wife, managing a large household, and with more agreeable and more lively neighbors than there were in L— to amuse her.

"No, do not fancy that," replied Augusta, with warmth; "do not hope that I shall change in this respect. I find that I have deceived myself in you. I must gain courage to speak to my father in your presence; I will not bear this misery any longer!"

And yet her deep-rooted fear of her father was so great, that she trembled at the

idea of enraging him by this open step, and deferred it for a few days longer.

About this time (it was in the beginning of August) the Major received the following letter from Cornet Stålkrona—

"MY DEAR FRIEND—You will think it high time that your eyes should be favored by the sight of the noble arms of the Stålkrona family. But on my honor you must excuse me; for since I have been here, I have scarcely been my own master, and have not had time to breathe, what with hunting every day, and one amusement after another. A trip to the baths, is the essence of all that is called life and pleasure. One immediately shakes off the tiresome and leaden chains of fashion, and lives as agreeably and harmlessly as if Paradise itself were transported to the spot, only that one is not so thinly clad as in that airy region. The way I pass my time here is, in a few words as follows:—I ride, dance, flirt, hunt and play billiards. I can easily imagine how you knit your brow while reading this: but you must remember dear Sterner, that the young Axel who roamed among Sorby Park's sweet labyrinths, or wandered with his gun through Sorby's thick forests, is the very opposite to Cornet Stålkrona, cavalier *par excellence* in the baths of —. But I fear if you get nothing more sensible to read, you will throw my epistle unread to one side, or perhaps do it the honor of lighting your pipe with it. But have a little patience, we shall come presently to the main point—to my beautiful charge! Yes, you may believe me, she is a dove whom I have to watch cursed sharply among the crowd of hawks who swarm round her here; yet I have worthily fulfilled my secret mission, and have been no idle spectator. Circumstantial narratives are not my forte, yet I owe this to you, and therefore shall try to make you understand how matters stand. So be attentive!

"Mrs. Stolzenbeck arrived eight days before me. I was so fortunate as to get a room in the house in which she resides. I paid my respects to her as an acquaintance of her daughter, and was very well received—the lady mother was alone. She honored me with a host of questions, about you, Sorby, and the heir, at which I absolutely trembled with rage. Henrietta came in, after having just finished her morning toilet. When she beheld me, she blushed very charmingly, and stammered something about eternal gratitude, thankfulness, and the like.

"'A mere trifle. Miss Stolzenbeck,' said I, in the most indifferent tone in the world. 'The whole matter is not worthy of a word from your beautiful lips.' She now blushed still more deeply, but evidently from anger.

"'Will you be at the *soirée* this evening?' asked she, changing the conversation.

"'Certainly,' I answered, 'I am burning

with impatience to show my admiration of all the beauties who are gathered together here.'

"'One must not always seek the object of such lively admiration in ball-rooms. Perhaps all those who may lay claim to the happy power of captivating you may not be there to-night,' said Henrietta, with a roguish smile; 'could it not be possible to make the sacrifice and desist from your intention for this once? My mother has company this evening; will you not honor us with your presence? It is true the party consists principally of some elderly people; no beauties, I tell you that beforehand; but you can easily make up for it another time; besides, my mother would be annoyed if you refused. She whispered as she left the room just now to ask you from her.'

"'There can be no question of compensation for so agreeable an evening as this will doubtless be; I accept your invitation with much pleasure,' said I, with all the politeness the occasion required: 'is your betrothed here?'

"'No,' replied she, shortly, 'he is in West-Gothland with his parents.'

"We were interrupted, and I took my departure.

"In the evening there were assembled in widow Stolzenbeck's dwelling all the most tiresome aged aunts, and crabbed, decrepit, gouty gentlemen that one could have brought together. I caught no glimpse of the goddess of the house. The time was insupportable; I had recourse to all that was at my command, and opened a half closed door that led into another room. Whom should I see here but my little dove, who as it seemed, was engaged in a very lively conversation with a fashionable young Englishman, who after having hunted for game the whole winter through in Schonen, had now come to the baths at — to try his luck here. Two roses, approaching to carmine in brilliancy of color, bloomed on Henrietta's cheeks, when with the prettiest embarrassment she introduced Mr. Macauley to Cornet Stålkrona. As he spoke Swedish very well, the conversation flowed pretty easily into the channel of the news of the day; but there was something in Henrietta's affected gayety, her blushes and her embarrassment, which did not please me. I thought of your predictions, and went away out of temper when the company separated.

"The following morning, when I was standing smoking my pipe at the window, I saw Mr. Macauley in the house opposite keeping watch behind a curtain. After I had been observing a while the curious movement which the curtain made backward and forward I heard a noise upon the steps, and soon Mrs. Stolzenbeck's massive form appeared, accompanied by a maid carrying her bathing things.

"Hem!" thought I, 'what is coming now,' I felt as if I were standing on burning coals. The good lady had scarcely turned the corner than the Englishman was across the street, and up the stairs. 'But that is too bad,' thought I; however I was obliged to content myself, for I could hardly do any thing better. The mother had come home long before the Englishman left.

"So she knows of, and allows his visits!" I became furious; but that did not help the matter. On the following morning all went on in the same way. But as this was renewed on the third, I took my hat and thought, 'I may as well call upon her too, then, perhaps, I may see how matters stand.' When I opened the door of the room where I had found her the last time, I discovered Mr. Macauley, to my no small astonishment, engaged giving Henrietta lessons in English. She sat with a grammar in her hand, and he turned over the leaves of a dictionary.

"This might possibly have been quite innocent; but it might also only be a pretext to meet each other oftener. I can not say that she looked embarrassed; but the demon of suspicion whispered into my ear that she may have begun this occupation when she heard some one in the ante-chamber. God forgive me if this thought was unworthy of me. The Englishman went directly after my arrival. I now ventured to ask how Lieutenant Sterner would like such a mark of favor from his *fiancée* to Mr. Macauley were he present.

"Such favor, do you say?" answered she in astonishment; "I should think Constantine should thank him for the trouble he is taking."

"Allow me to doubt that, my dear Miss Von Stolzenbeck," said I.

"You are quite at liberty to do so, sir," replied she, proudly; "but permit me to take care of my own affairs."

"I bowed coldly and took my departure. I saw with pain that every day passed in this manner. They read together, drove, rode, walked with each other. He breakfasts with Mrs. Stolzenbeck, dines and sups there. I was extremely sorry for your cousin, when I at last perceived that they even began to send little notes backward and forward. I again tried, with all the earnestness and all the eloquence of which I was capable, to represent to Henrietta the thoughtlessness and impropriety of her conduct when she had such sacred duties to perform.

"Spare your eloquence," replied she, proudly; "I have no more duties to perform toward Lieutenant Sterner. His behavior during my stay here perfectly exempts me from them."

"Some misunderstanding must exist," I assured her.

"Not at all! I know for a certainty that he has deceived me."

"What do you mean?" asked I, confounded at her frankness; "you will not surely break an oath you have pledged to another, only on an erroneous idea, as I am certain it is?"

"I have already told you," replied she, angrily, "that my promise is canceled. Therefore I intend, with your permission, to bestow my hand, heart, and faith on a more worthy object."

"Mr. Macauley?" asked I.

"Why not?" answered she, with such astonishing levity, that in my inmost heart I detested her.

"This happened this morning, and now I have laid open my heart to you. What do you think of the matter? Write me by return of post what news you have from your cousin. I hope he won't be such a fool as to grieve at his loss; on my honor she is not worth it. She intends to remain about a fortnight longer here, therefore I shall do the same.

"I am very curious to know what will be the end of this adventure: after all that has passed it must terminate in an engagement. Let me soon hear from you, dear friend. It is the wish of your faithful,

"AXEL."

The Major sat a good hour absorbed in deep thought after he had received this letter. His features changed in rapid succession from pain to anger. Now and then, however, a ray of satisfaction beamed in his eyes, yet it was evident that his feelings were divided.

The heir entered at that moment. With wonderful indifference the Major stuck the letter in his pocket, and resumed his usual calm bearing, so that his visitor could not observe that the slightest disturbance had happened.

CHAPTER XLIV.

EXPLANATION BETWEEN THE FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

WHEN young Sterner returned late in the evening from the Major's, he seemed very much depressed and gloomy. He appeared to Augusta so distressed, that she was cut to the soul. She knew what it was to suffer.

"You must go and travel," said she to him, sympathizingly. "Our life here is too monotonous for you." He shook his head in silence. "Do go, dear Sterner!" She had never spoken so kindly to him before. "Your absence would do us good; these eternal scenes are very injurious to us both."

"And how long do you think I could be absent? Do not deceive yourself; our fate must soon be decided, for human patience

can not endure it much longer." He went gloomily from her.

"Wait a moment," cried Augusta with suddenly acquired firmness. He turned round. "To-morrow, Mr. Sterner, to-morrow you shall be free; before then I shall decidedly speak to my father!"

Sterner bowed in silence and went.

"My God!" sighed she, with fervent devotion, "give me strength to accomplish it! Yes, to-morrow it must be!"

Augusta spent the whole night in thinking over the reasons and arguments which she should bring forward against her father's iron will and dictatorial sentence. To work upon his feelings was not to be thought of; only a decided declaration in Mr. Sterner's presence, that she would never marry him, could terminate the affair. It would then be seen that the engagement which existed between them had only been brought about by compulsion, and the post-inspector could do nothing if the heir declared, that under these circumstances he would not insist upon a marriage. Thus Augusta thought, and consoled herself. The morning came; the poor girl trembled like a leaf agitated by the wind; but true to her promise and intentions, after a fervent prayer, she betook herself to the post-inspector's room. It was an hour before the time that young Sterner usually made his appearance; but when she opened the door, and cast a glance at her father, all her courage disappeared as he, knitting his brow at her early visit, fixed his stern eyes darkly upon her, and she could only exclaim while clasping his knees: "Oh, my father! do not make me so wretchedly unhappy; I can not, no, it is impossible for me to marry the heir!"

"What do you say?—are you mad?" asked the post-inspector, in a voice which might be likened to the hollow roaring of an enraged wild beast. "Is it a time *now* to talk about whether you will or will not have him, when the day for publishing the bans will soon be fixed? But though you were to repeat your assertion a hundred times, I swear by my poor soul, that if you live, you shall go to Sorby as Sterner's wife before the autumn. Fret and grieve as much as you please; but I have had enough of this devout air, and eyes red with weeping. I shall keep my word, you know *that*. If I had thought of paying any attention to your foolish whims, it would have been before *now*; for your wishes on the one side and your reluctance on the other, have long been known to me."

"But, my dear father, I have explained my feelings to Mr. Sterner; I did so on the first morning after his arrival; therefore he knows that I will never be his wife."

"Silence you stupid goose!" thundered the post-inspector, who heard his future son-in-law's well-known step on the stairs;

"not a word more of this nonsense, otherwise—you know me!"

But as the guest entered, Augusta, who perceived that there might never be so favorable an opportunity again, though trembling for fear of her furious father, exclaimed: "Oh, sir, save me from the most dreadful misfortune—persuade my father! You know that I would rather die than go to the altar with a false oath upon my lips."

"So, you have at last resolved upon this final scene," said Sterner, with cold freezing calmness; then turning to the post-inspector: "You must perceive, sir, that as your daughter abhors a union with me, it is my duty—"

"To take possession of the whole property," said the post-inspector, continuing the broken-off sentence. "But I tell you, it shall never be. Show me the part in the testament which gives you the power to break off!"

"I very well know that it does not exist; but then, it says in plain and distinct words: 'If there should arise any impediments on her side,' &c."

"But," exclaimed Von Spalden, in the rude vulgar tone which was peculiar to him when he was excited: "But no impediments have arisen! The girl is a disobedient fool, whom I will soon tame; and I, as her father, who have the disposal of her hand, make myself answerable that all shall go on well and properly."

Augusta was quite annihilated.

"You can not wish to have a wife upon these terms," said she. "It is opposed to the laws of God and man, and if you take advantage of my father's immovable severity, you will trample under foot your own honor."

"If it had depended upon me, Miss Von Spalden," answered Sterner, coldly, "you had been long since at liberty; but unfortunately we are both to a certain degree bound. It could be no happiness for me to carry home a wife who would have mortified my love a hundred times by the never-ending repetition of her fearful grief and sorrow. If your father will dissolve this ill-judged connection, I not only resign your hand, but even promise to cede to you the half of the property!"

"Your obedient servant?" said the post-inspector, with a suspicious smile. "You are much too generous; but with your permission I think we should do best to follow the sensible and judicious plan which the testator projected."

Saying these words, the post-inspector gave Augusta a significant look to withdraw. In the evening the Major came. While the post-inspector and the younger Sterner seemed to have every thought engaged in a game of chess, the Major slipped to Augusta's room. He had not spoken to her alone since the eventful evening of the ball.

Contrary to the usual custom the door was only ajar, he opened it softly, but stood still when he beheld Augusta half reclining upon the sofa, turned from the door, silently weeping with her face buried in the cushion. She heard nothing; ever since the morning her heart had been filled with wild despair.

"You, dearly beloved," sighed he, "you weep on my account, but I can not dry your tears yet." He watched her a few seconds with increasing emotion, without daring to breathe.

"Ah, he knows my misery, and yet—yet he does not whisper to my heart one single word of comfort," said Augusta half aloud to herself. "Oh, cruel, cruel Alexander! will you then see me die, to convince you at last that I love you above every thing on the earth? Alive they shall not drag me to the altar with the hateful heir?"

She was silent and wept bitterly.

"No, I can not take leave, I can not speak to her," thought Sterner. "If at this moment I saw her weeping eyes and lovely face imploring me for help, I should not be master of myself." He drew slowly back, and shut the door.

Augusta came to table silent and pale. The post-inspector, in whose breast was a heart of stone, jested about it in his manner, and related to the Major what a laughable scene had taken place that morning.

"The best of the joke," added he, with a significant, repulsive smile, "is Constantine's generosity; he would give up the half of the property to our romantic heroine and her chosen lover, whom, by the way, I do not know and hope never to behold. What do you say to such liberality, my dear Major?"

"If I do not deceive myself," said Sterner with a dignity which put an end to the post-inspector's loquaciousness, "neither Miss Augusta nor he, whom you honor with the title of her chosen lover, would accept such an offer. At least I would not do so?" Thus saying the Major's manly countenance crimsoned deeply, and an angry glance darted its lightning at the astonished post-inspector. "Were any heart to beat for me, much as I should be flattered, I should despise its owner if she would condescend to receive from strange hands what I could not myself offer. And I would not care much for a woman who would not willingly prefer to share with me the scanty portion of this world's goods, which Providence had assigned to me, to a life of luxury with a man whom she did not love."

A general and deep silence followed these words. The post-inspector did not feel very comfortable; the Major was not the man with whom one could dispute with any advantage. He had always had an inexplicable respect, a sort of fear (otherwise quite unknown to him) for his calm, cold, decided tone; but too long a silence might have a

bad effect upon the submission to which he had accustomed his wife and daughter. This was too high a game. He bethought him of an answer, and after he had coughed several times, he began at last with a sort of smile—

"I hope you understand a joke, Major. It could naturally never be my intention to have offended you, by the foolish supposition that you aimed at snatching away your cousin's affianced wife before his face."

"It is quite indifferent to me what you do or do not suppose in this respect," answered the Major, proudly. "It is your pleasure to wound, to pierce your daughter's heart, yes, even to see it bleed, and why? merely because she dares, like every other reasonable being, to exercise the privilege of thought, and because her wishes are in opposition to your plans, which a dearly-bought experience ought to have taught you to distrust. Such unnatural conduct in a father excites my detestation, and induces me to inform you that this match, for which you would sacrifice your daughter, will meet with impediments which may annihilate all your schemes."

"What do you say, sir?" cried the post-inspector, trembling so violently with anger, that the words which passed his lips were hardly intelligible. "We do not live, the Lord be thanked, in a country where daughters are allowed to oppose their parents' will in such cases. I presume you know that it is I, her father, who have the disposal of her hand, and you should remember your own words, which, if I do not mistake, ran thus—I swear by my honor and salvation, that I never wish, nor ever will oppose the execution of the will."

"And I say so again," continued the Major; "but there are here certain important points, which have not yet come to your knowledge. However it will not be very long now before you will be convinced how far I am capable of keeping my word. In the mean time, do not be violent toward your noble daughter; that is the only thing I request of you, and therein, without doubt, her intended agrees. I shall be absent about ten or twelve days, and after that time we shall see each other again."

The Major rose, kissed Augusta's hand, bowed to the remaining company, and left the room.

Contrary to all custom, and the expectation of every one, the post-inspector said not a word: not the slightest storm was visible; but his face was as pale as death, his lips blue and trembling. Constantine sat, during the whole scene, the picture of the most perfect indifference. He picked his teeth with a gold toothpick, while he comfortably rocked himself backward and forward in his chair; casting, now and then, through his spectacles, a look of contempt upon the

post-inspector, who was now as much tormented as the rich man in purgatory. At length he gave vent to his anger, and asked his wife—

"Rigitza, have we new moon on Sunday?"

"No, husband," answered his wife, trembling at the meaning of this question; "the last quarter."

"Well, any how, it is a superstition," continued he, "and if you, Mr. Son-in-law, as I presume, are as little inclined as I am to allow yourself to be insulted by that great boaster—who I wish with all my heart could have the next appointment as envoy to Botany Bay—let us have the first bans called next Sunday."

"Yes, I almost think," replied young Sterner, carelessly, "that it is as well to let the curtain fall as soon as possible: the drama is beginning to get tiresome. However, to-day is Friday, and to-morrow it won't do to call the bans; but next week we will go to the parson, if it pleases you, Mr. Von Spalden."

"Done, my good friend!" and, by way of sealing the compact, Mr Von Spalden held out to him his hand. "But tell me, what points were those about which he threatened?"

"On my honor, I know nothing but the clear contents of the will; and we have to act according to nothing else."

"That is also my view of the case," said the post-inspector, as he lighted his pipe—a sign that he was calmed down. Augusta was so confused at all she had heard and seen, that she could scarcely recollect what had happened; but she recovered herself in her own room, and there, with her dear mother's assistance, who faithfully repeated to her the Major's words, manner, looks, with her own conclusions, comfort gradually dawned upon Augusta, and her heart heaved with happy feelings and fervent gratitude to the merciful ruler of her fate: for, unquestionably, in the Major's expressions lay the germ of the most joyful hope. But there still remained some gall in the cup of joy, when she remembered the agreement which she had heard at the end of the dinner; namely, that they would have the bans called before the Major's return. Augusta committed her destiny to the hands of the Almighty, and slept more calmly this night than she had done for a long time.

CHAPTER XLV.

HOW MATTERS WERE GOING ON AT SORRBY PARK.

THE Major had fixed his departure for the following morning. It was his intention to make a tour to the baths of — as quickly

as possible, to make further inquiries himself concerning the circumstance Axel had written him about; for he considered the matter of too great importance to his friend to let it rest where it was. But just as he was about to step into the carriage he received a letter with a black seal. He tore it hastily open and read in alarm some lines from Axel. They were written the day after his former letter, and ran thus:

"I have this moment received the painful news that my father has died suddenly of apoplexy, probably caused by a totally unexpected call for a sum lent on Sorrbj Park; my mother and sisters are wretched, and I not much less so. I pray you, for Heaven's sake, to meet me by Monday, the 9th August, at Sorrbj."

"This morning, Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck and her daughter left the baths quite unexpectedly, and no one knows where they have gone. The Englishman is still here."

"The ninth," said the Major, reflecting—"it will scarcely be possible for me to be there by that time. Poor Axel, and you, dear Wilhelmina, my friendship for you shall hasten the journey; but which way can that intriguing coquette have taken? Turn round, postillion, we shall strike into another road."

As he drove by the post-inspector's house he sent to beg his cousin to come down to him for a few minutes. They conversed earnestly, but in a low voice, and an hour later he also drove through the same gate, and overtook the Major a few miles from the town, whereupon they continued together day and night. They reached the parsonage at Wallaryd on Sunday evening. The parson, who was working at a funeral oration for the departed Colonel, to be pronounced at the grave, and also had to compose a second which he was to deliver in the house of mourning itself, had little time to devote to his guests, esteemed and welcome as they were to him.

"You are at home in Wallaryd, my dear Sterner," said he to the Major; "therefore you can kindly undertake to be your cousin's host."

Mrs. Svallenius, who was kindness itself, because she had the honor of being the first in the parish to lodge and entertain the new proprietor, had the best that her house could afford served up on this important occasion. As soon as they were quietly seated at their supper, and the children and domestics were sent away, Mrs. Svallenius, who had always had a spite against the proud inhabitants of Sorrbj Park, began to relate, with ill-concealed pleasure, the misfortune which had befallen the family since the Major's departure. Miss Mina's last illness which had been so severe and odd, was first brought forward.

"Ah, the wicked world!" sighed Mrs. Svallenius; "Heaven defend me from re-

peating all that is said! It would seem too great an attack upon you, my dear Major. Well, I say nothing. She is, thank God, well again. Then followed Cornet Axel's sinful journey to the baths. I say sinful," continued she, "for, in the first place, it is a sin to go to such a place when one is as healthy as the kernel of a nut, and secondly, the father's limited finances were sadly burdened for the son's pleasure. Then comes a pretty tale. The Colonel received a letter from a mercantile house in Y—, on the 30th July, giving warning, that a considerable loan, which had been drawn upon Sorrbj Park with conditions, must be redeemed within a month, or he must prepare himself to have the mortgage sold. Well, that was too hard to digest, as you may imagine, gentlemen. When the old man had read the letter, he fell to the ground in a fit of apoplexy, and died before the messenger, who was sent to town for the doctor, had got even half-way. Then came a flying courier to fetch Svallenius. Oh! you can not think what a state they were in at that house!—But, what is this, gentlemen? you are eating nothing at all! May I help you to a little more fish, Mr. Sterner? Dear Major, you have no sauce.—Well, as I have said, the house was in such a state: the old man cold and lifeless upon the bed; Miss Mina fainting upon a sofa; the Baroness incessantly shrieking, and Miss Nora, poor child, jumping here and there, without being able to help any one. But I had schooled Svallenius, before his departure, to be firm and active in rendering help if it were wanted; and I must say, to his praise, that the old man surpassed himself this time. First he sent off a peasant to countermand the doctor, in case he was not already on the way; for although every one knew that the circumstances of the house did not permit of any unnecessary expenditure upon physicians, yet no one had thought of preventing this evil. Then, with his own hand, he poured two glasses of cold water over the eldest young lady, and hushed the screams of the Baroness by sensible discourse about Christian resignation, about the resurrection and meeting again in a better land, and much else that was true, good, and consoling. Afterward he most judiciously had an empty granary arranged to lay the dead body out in, and had the corpse removed into it from the bedroom, for there it was airy and cool, and the August heat is not to be joked with. At length he wrote a few lines, and sent a messenger with them to Cornet Axel. After all these occupations (I can assure you, that in the course of his whole life, the good man has had none more perplexing) he returned loaded with thanks of the whole family.—A little more pancake, my dear Major.—But still Svallenius did forget something, notwithstanding I reminded him of it at least ten times."

"Well, what was that?" asked the gentlemen.

"Oh, to hang the sheets before the window!—I fear you don't like the cherry soup, Mr. Sterner?"

"Upon my honor, Mrs. Svallenius, it is the best I have ever eaten; may I beg you for some more?"

"Oh, you are much too kind; but I confidently hope that this is not the last time I shall entertain our noble neighbor in my poor house."

"Most likely not, my dear Mrs. Svallenius; although I am perfectly convinced that your excellent and wise arrangements have made Sorrbj an agreeable place of residence for me, still I intend to claim your hospitality very often; besides, I believe that hunting is nowhere better than here. But I see the journey has made our Major sleepy and tired; and, as we must be in Sorrbj by eleven o'clock to-morrow morning, we must now wish our amiable hostess good-night!"

Directly after breakfast the gentlemen started.

"We shall meet to-morrow at the funeral," said Mrs. Svallenius, gayly courtesying down to the ground to her bowing guests.

As soon as they had reached their destination, Westerlind was sent to Sorrbj Park to inform Cornet Axel of their arrival. An hour later he himself galloped into the court and threw himself from his horse into the Major's arms. They went silently along, side by side, until they reached the Major's room; but here Axel gave way to his grief:

"My mother's despair, Wilhelmina's silent sorrow," lamented the miserable youth (this was his first trial in the school of misfortune), "break my heart! for our situation is helpless if you, dear Sterner, will not use your influence with the proprietor of Sorrbj to get him to advance the sum for me, for which he can take the same mortgage upon Sorrbj Park, which the former creditor possessed. Tell me quickly, Alexander, plainly, and do not torture me too long: do you think you could accomplish this?"

"Do not doubt it; I can and will, and pray you, in this respect, to be at ease; you have my word for it. How is Wilhelmina?"

"First let me thank you with all my heart for your noble promise," said Axel, as he shook the Major cordially by the hand.—"I am very uneasy about my sister. Mamma and Aurora grieve terribly; but they have feelings and thoughts for every thing that goes on round them, and occupy themselves with the funeral: not so Wilhelmina, she suffers from so many causes. It is true, she is quiet and patient, but her grief is deeper although silent like her lips. Ah! Alexander, I love my sweet, pale lily unutterably; but I fear, I tremble lest she should quite fade and be too early snapped by the inflexible hand of death; and I feel that would be

even harder for me to bear than my present misfortune."

Although there was no direct meaning in Axel's words, yet there was something in his voice and look which, although soft, seemed to say to the Major, "This is your doing."

Sterner knew what Axel thought; his emotion was great, and he did not attempt to conceal it.

"Axel," said he, gloomily, "life does not bear roses alone, but also thorns; they grow against our will, and as we can not root them out, for they also have their time for maturity, we must let the sources which nourish them, bleed freely until their bitterness is exhausted and time has dried them. But," continued he, after a few seconds, and his brow cleared, "why these mysterious words, Axel? we understand each other. I will tell you, that Wilhelmina shall still be happy, if it lies in human power to establish, little by little, peace in that innocent heart, whose paradise has certainly not faded forever. I have thought of a plan, and I hope that the Lord will permit it to prosper: when the sad ceremony is over I shall speak to you further about it. In the mean time, tell me what more you know about Henrietta?"

"Only this, that Mr. Macauley is to meet them three weeks hence in F——; I heard this from himself, but he could not, or would not, disclose to me whither they had gone. It is generally thought that the engagement will be openly declared; but it is necessary that the other affair should be put an end to before this step can be taken. Do you know in what your cousin has been wanting?—Henrietta declares, that he himself gave occasion for the rupture."

"He is perfectly innocent, I pledge my honor on it," answered the Major seriously. "Some gossip has gone abroad, but an explanation shall bring his innocence clearly to light, and, although too late, show the heartless and frivolous being what she has lost. But it is better as it is, Constantine will despise her, and perceive that he never truly loved her, but that he had only been captivated by the usual siren-like arts of a coquette. If she had still been at the baths, it would have given me pleasure to have read her a lecture, as they say. To seize a suspicion, to catch at a chimera in order to carry on, under the mask of wounded feelings, a love intrigue, which possibly, according to her opinion, is a more advantageous one, is most detestable, and makes my blood boil. Ah, Axel, I could almost weep that there are such beings among her sex, for there are thousands who, from mere caprice, sacrifice the warmest and most faithful hearts. I could weep over them, weak, fallen angels! and yet I do say that the way this case has turned out is all for the best.

"But the matter shall not rest here! Come,

Axel, I will introduce you to the master of the house."

The gentlemen betook themselves into the saloon.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE FUNERAL AND THE DAY FOLLOWING IT.

ALL the bells in the parish tolled on Tuesday, the 2d of August. The earthly remains of Lieutenant-colonel Von Stalkrona were to be committed to the ground, in Wallaryd, where the Parish Church was situated. There was a crowd in the church-yard, which hourly increased, for the ceremony was to take place before noon, as it generally does in the country when one has a long way to go to the church. On such occasions the guests assemble very early in the morning, partake of a slight breakfast in common with the members of the house of mourning, ladies as well as gentlemen (for in some communities the former also follow to the grave), and then accompany the departed to his resting-place. When the ceremony is over, the whole company return to the place from which they set out, there to drive away the sad and lingering impressions of the gloomy scene at a well-covered dinner table.

It was about twelve o'clock at noon, as the spectators who had stationed themselves on the top of the church-yard walls, caught the first glimpse of the long black funeral procession. It stopped a short way from the church, every one descended from the carriages, and a detachment of soldiers from the regiment in which the Colonel had formerly been a Major, opened the procession. Eight of the soldiers lifted down the bier, on the top of which they laid his sword and belt, &c. After some short delay to marshal the men the procession moved forward in gloomy pomp. Next to the hearse, tottered the old Baroness between her son and pastor Svalenius. Behind them was seen approaching Wilhelmina's splendid form, leaning on the younger Sterner's arm. The black attire, which heightened the dazzling whiteness of her complexion, and the long dark vail which covered like a hearse-cloth the blackness of her hair and eyes, united in lending this beautiful being an indescribable, one could almost say, a sacred charm. The Major led Aurora, and after them followed, in the usual order, a whole crowd of mourning, yet not all grieving neighbors and friends.

As they entered the solemnly decorated church, a soft dirge arose from the choir in deep, rich tones. The coffin was laid upon an elevation in the choir, and pastor Svalenius and his assistant proceeded to the altar. When the last chord of the instruments trembling in the air had died away, a psalm was sung, and the pastor ascended the pulpit to eulogize

the public and private virtues of the departed; for who has not virtues after death?

Svalleinius could be looked upon as a real orator, when the subject-matter, as was the case at present, lay within his horizon, and on this day he fulfilled his duty with powerful genius. After eulogizing the dead, he spoke simple words of peace and comfort to the mourners. The hope of immortality brightly penetrating the veil of life, flowed from his lips in mild, artless words, and not an eye was dry, nor a heart unmoved.

As the coffin was raised, the dirge commenced again, and slowly they proceeded to the grave. On one side the soldiers were placed in two files; a young ensign gave the order to shoulder arms, and the whole procession formed a thick circle; but as the coffin was lowered, all drew back, and the hymn was drowned by a double volley which was fired over the grave. At the terrible report Wilhelmina uttered a heart-rending scream; this was the first sound which during the whole ceremony had escaped her pale lips. She sank trembling, almost senseless into the younger Sterner's outstretched arms.

"Take her to the carriages," whispered the Major to his cousin, and he was going hastily to carry her away from the exciting scene, but she quickly recovered and merely took his arm. She cast one more lingering, sorrowful look upon her father's grave, then went slowly away with her companion to the large square where the carriages were waiting.

"Calm yourself, Miss Von Stalkrona," said Constantine, trying to console her; "remember our worthy Svalleinius's words, 'Sorrow is passing, for there is nothing eternal but God's grace.'"

"I know," replied she, mildly, "but I am not yet capable of receiving the comfort which lies in these words. Time must first heal the wounds of my heart."

"May I hope," continued Sterner, "that when Fate permits me to become your neighbor, I may approach, as a sympathizing friend, the lovely angel who, like an apparition out of a better land, will constantly hover around me in sacred dreams?"

Wilhelmina looked at him in astonishment, and was very nearly offended.

"Our new neighbor in Sorrbý," answered she coldly, "will always be welcome to us at Sorrbý Park. When will you bring your young wife to us?"

"When I shall bring my young wife home," said Sterner, looking sad, "God alone knows. There was no offense in my words; they were only the simple expression of my feelings; for my heart also has had wounds which require to be healed."

"Then I sincerely pity you," said Wilhelmina, dropping her veil, for the young man's eyes were fixed upon her features in undisguised admiration. "Look Mr. Stern-

er, they are all coming back now, the whole gloomy, black procession; ah! I have no longer a father!" She burst into tears, which softened her oppressive grief.

After they had been pushed about and squeezed awhile, they got safely to the carriages, and at length, also, to Sorrbý Park, where the guests saw, with longing looks, the covers lifted from the smoking dishes, and the corks drawn from the bottles: they seated themselves comfortably. Under the cheerful influence of the genial enjoyments at table, the soul gradually returned from its high soaring, and sank to the inferior arena of every-day life. Considering that they had been to a funeral, the conversation was tolerably lively; even our good Major shared the talkativeness of the others—he got absorbed in a sharp discussion about wolf-hunting, forest-burning, &c., and only the heir sat silent at the side of his beautiful pale neighbor. Wilhelmina was pleased with him for this delicacy of feeling; but could she have known how his thoughts were occupied, she would have found that they were not of a less worldly nature than those of the other guests; for he was recalling to his memory all the beautiful women whom he had seen at home and abroad; and the result of this general review was, that with the exception of Augusta Von Spalden, Wilhelmina Von Stalkrona was the *ne plus ultra* of all united charms.

"And I don't know yet," thought he again, the more he examined the tall figure, the noble expression, the delicate youthful features—"I don't know yet to which of these two I would award the highest prize, if I saw them together."

When the cousins returned home in the evening, Constantine communicated to the Major his comparisons; the latter smiled, pressed his hand, and said—

"Next to Augusta, cousin—next to her, Wilhelmina is, without question, the finest and most amiable girl I know; yes, a true pearl! But your heart is too susceptible, Constantine; you must first wait to see how the affair with your betrothed will end before you think of any change in the object of your love."

"Do not talk so thoughtlessly. Alexander! Do you fancy because Wilhelmina is an angel that I must necessarily be in love with her?"

"Well, if you are not exactly in love," replied the Major, "you are in a fair way to become so; and although Miss Von Stalkrona is no angel, she does just as well to serve merely as a conductor to the electricity of your flighty inflammable feelings."

"You are mightily tiresome with your eternal moralizing; I have too much to think of, and too many griefs in my heart, to subject myself any longer to your tormenting sermons, therefore good-night, Sir Moni-

tor!" and with a smile, which decidedly contradicted these numerous griefs, the heir took his way to his bedroom.

The following afternoon the gentlemen from Sorrbý paid their farewell visit to Sorrbý Park; for the younger Sterner, in consequence of the agreement which he had made with the post-inspector, was obliged to be in L— on Friday evening, or, at latest, on the following morning. When they entered the dining-room, each member of the family was assembled there; the Baroness sat with her spectacles upon her nose, spelling the blessed Colonel's funeral oration; the Cornet was looking through some dusty bundles of papers; Aurora stood at a table, upon which was a large bowl of water between two little hills of table napkins: she was folding linen. At her side stood Ensign Schmoll, who received in his outstretched arm the heaps as they were finished to lay them to one side; he was the same young man who had commanded the salute of honor at the Colonel's funeral. Out of gratitude for the trouble he was taking, Aurora now and then besprinkled him as well as the table-napkins with the fresh water. They whispered together softly and eagerly, and Aurora's hand at times remained idle, when she gave too much attention to the Ensign's communications. On such occasions she could not stifle a slight laugh, which, when the Baroness overheard, she would exclaim with a devout sigh—

"Nora, Nora, my child! do you not remember the ceremony at which that linen was used?"

"Ah, yes, dear mamma; but Ensign Schmoll tempts me to talk and listen to what he is saying; it really grieves me."

"My dear madam," stammered young Schmoll, "Miss Aurora accidentally threw a little water into my eyes, and this was the cause, against my will, of my distorting my mouth."

"Hush, hush! joking in the house of mourning is not to be excused!" So saying the good lady turned her eyes again upon the funeral oration, and began, half-aloud—'For no—' Svalenius's hand is very indistinct—for no—earthly pleasure which he—could possess, would be en—dur—enduring; therefore a true Chri—Chris—Christian should'—Nora, my child, have you given the fowls the oats, and put the groats in the water for the chickens? I am not capable in these days of sorrow of thinking of such trifles, therefore it is your duty not to forget the poor animals;" and the Baroness sighed again, and again took up the sermon, which had been begun a hundred times and as often laid down. During the above, Wilhelmina sat silently in the corner of the room, and was engaged rubbing spots from a little gilt frame which held the Colonel's portrait. She had always been her father's

favorite, and probably lamented his death the most.

When the Major and young Sterner entered, a half revolution took place in the little party, occasioned by the latter, who was almost a stranger to the family.

Axel hastily gathered his papers together, Aurora her table-napkins, and the Baroness shoved spectacles, sermon, and snuff-box into her apron. The Ensign drew the table to one side, and Wilhelmina, who was the most collected, opened the door to the drawing-room. They entered, bowed, and paid their compliments. They pleaded their speedy departure as an excuse for their early visit, and, thanks to the Major's tact, they soon fell into unconstrained conversation. Half an hour afterward he withdrew with Axel to talk over, undisturbed, the affairs of the house, as well as a particular matter which interested them both.

In the mean time Constantine exerted himself to entertain the young ladies; but Aurora was so exclusively occupied listening to Ensign Schmoll's lively ideas, that she could not divide her attention. He turned himself therefore the more ardently to Mina, who rewarded his eloquence with a kind smile, when he enthusiastically described the delightful impression made upon him by the grand scenery which the charming little Sorrbý Park, as well as Sorrbý, presented. The excitement of the conversation, called forth feelings and words, so rich, so glowing and poetic that he could scarcely believe that he himself was the speaker, so new and unusual was the warm state of mind which unexpectedly came over him. He felt himself so extremely comfortable and at home, that for the first time he experienced a tinge of ill-humor toward the Major, when he came back and the conversation became general. After a little persuasion on the part of the Baroness, the gentlemen remained to dinner. In the evening the Major accidentally met Wilhelmina alone in the dining-room. He led her to an open window.

"My dear Miss Von Stålkrona," began he, "I have a request to make, which—"

"Ah, Major Sterner," said she, interrupting him hastily, "let me first express my boundless gratitude for the kind manner in which you have assisted us in these days of trial. Axel has been speaking to me, and I have heard of your generosity. Ah, if you only knew how distressed I was on my mother's account! For myself and Aurora, I was not; we are young and healthy, and we should certainly have succeeded in finding situations in some respectable house. Since I have become acquainted with the involved state of my father's affairs, I have accustomed myself to the thought of gaining my livelihood among other people, however painful it would be for me to be obliged to leave my beloved Sorrbý Park."

"Heaven preserve us from such a necessity!" said the Major, pressing her hand in great emotion; "dearest Wilhelmina, as long as fate permits me to be the friend, the brother, the member of a family whom I love as my own, this hand shall never be obliged to seek help from strangers; and with Axel's activity, for he is such an industrious and honest youth, the debts will soon be paid. Therefore you see," added Sterner, with his usual delicacy, as he always feared to hurt the feelings of others, "there can be no mention of obligation here."

"It is not humiliating," said Wilhelmina, "to be obliged to you, Major Sterner. This does not cause me the least uneasiness; for we all esteem you so highly."

"This is a moment," said Sterner, smiling, "which I shall always remember with pride, as one of the happiest in my life. But, dear Wilhelmina, it would be happier for me still, if you would grant me a request which I lately made to you. The next time I visit Sorby Park I may perhaps be able to ask you to fulfill the promise which you made me about a month ago, when we were talking of a matter which is so dear to my heart."

"What promise?" stammered Wilhelmina, blushing. "Has that time come already?"

"It will soon, I hope," replied the Major; "then may I reckon upon your promise being realized?"

"Certainly," answered she; "I already love with all my heart the original of that beautiful picture which you showed me; but why do you lay such stress upon it?"

"Because friendship between you two would be the foundation of our true happiness. Peace, love and concord would wind chains of roses round the two families. But then I shall bring another person with me, for whom I would beg your warmest interest. If it be in your power to grant my wishes in this respect give me your hand upon it, that you will not refuse me a sincere answer when I ask it of you."

Sterner spoke with irresistible warmth and cordiality. Wilhelmina gave him her hand, laughed and said—

"My kind friend, I shall never regard with indifference your endeavors for my happiness. If you some day, but not too soon, ask an answer to the request which you intend to make, be as assured of a sincere and truthful answer, as of my inclination to accomplish your wish, that is to say, if it is not against my principles and feelings, which, however, I think I have no reason to fear."

"I am perfectly contented with that," replied the Major, and they separated with a friendly significant shake of the hand; he, under the pleasing feeling of having paved the way for his favorite idea, and at the same time of having suggested something to divert

her mind from its painful reflections; she, pondering over the mysterious meaning of his words, in which the image of the person he would bring with him appeared under different forms. However, all her thoughts united in one, that the Major was eagerly endeavoring to promote her future happiness.

"But ah!" sighed, she, "I can never be happy, for there is only one man whom I can love; and he—he shall at least never see me weak, for his esteem is now the highest prize for which I can strive, and which alone makes life of any value to me."

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE TRAVELERS.

In the night between the 12th and 13th of August, a close traveling-carriage rolled through the streets of L——, and stopped at *Traiteur Tejfer's Hotel*. The reader must know that this worthy man had had what was formerly called "*The Inn*," rebuilt and so much enlarged, as in the eyes of its proprietor to justify its claim to a more distinguished title. The carriage stopped, the coachman jumped down and knocked with his powerful fist against the door of the house. After a while a window was opened, and Mr. Tejfer himself, only half dressed, stretched out his head.

"Who is there?" asked he, yawning.

"Travelers," answered the coachman.

"That I can see, you blockhead! But what sort of people are they?"

"I do not know," continued the postillion.

"They did not get out of the carriage at the last station. I had received orders beforehand, and was ready to put the horses to the carriage as soon as it arrived."

Traiteur Tejfer slammed the window down, highly dissatisfied, and after ten minutes' waiting the door was opened, so that the travelers could drive into the court.

"Open the carriage door," a commanding voice from within was heard to say; and after the coachman had, with much trouble, executed the order, a large well-dressed lady stepped out followed by another, whose slender form and light movement showed the grace and ease of youth; although the veil which the darkness of night had spread over every thing made it impossible to distinguish her features.

The ladies, as silent as ghosts, followed a sleepy chambermaid to No. 2, the same room which we have once before visited in company with Major Sterner, when he arrived in L—— for the first time.

"Will the ladies require any thing besides the beds?" asked the maid, as she lighted a candle and set it down.

"Some cold meat and two cups of chocolate, if you can procure it?" answered the elder lady.

As the maid fancied, from the ladies appearance, that she might depend upon receiving a good fee, she hastened to procure what was required. When the ladies were alone, the younger one laid aside her traveling cloak, and respectfully helped the elder lady to take off hers. Then her tongue was loosened and she began, half crying :

"Well, mamma, so here we are in L——, I wish to heaven I had never allowed myself to be persuaded to take this journey! Here, then, the truth shall come to light. But, mamma, think if that news were false, and he were innocent! with what face must I then stand before him!—Ah, alas! the nearer the moment of explanation comes, the more I fear I have acted frivolously and wrongly in pledging my word to another before I had heard his explanation."

"His explanation!" scornfully replied the mother, in whom the reader will recognize Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck, "as if the matter admitted of excuplation! No, Henrietta, you have acted as you should have done. In the first place I, your mother, consider it right; and then, I think, you have done what your own heart dictated; for did you not almost die of grief when we were leaving the baths? And when your lover described, with fiery eloquence, his longing for the end of these three weeks, I heard you answer: 'Ah, they will be an eternity for me also!' and after such an acknowledgment, I almost consider it ridiculous to speak of repentance or fear."

"Nor do I deny, dear mamma, that I *should* be in despair if this, my last engagement, should be broken off, for the hope of traveling in foreign countries as a lady of wealth and consequence, and with a husband too whom one loves, and by whom one is adored, is a happiness which I would not, without the bitterest sorrow, exchange for a miserable marriage with a poor Lieutenant, whose trifling pay is scarcely sufficient for his own support, much less for the wants of a whole family—if mamma had not maintained us; and this thought is too vexing."

"Well, my dear, if you perceive all that why do you give yourself so much unnecessary annoyance? You have been too long a child, Henrietta; it is now time that the sense of a grown-up woman should take the place of nonsense and thoughtlessness."

"My dear mamma, I fear that I have never acted more thoughtlessly than from the time which you say my sensible actions commenced. Was not Constantine formerly my whole world? and now I feel a painful uneasiness at the mere thought of seeing him again, because I have been faithless to him and have forgotten him for the sake of better prospects. Oh, my dear mother! would to God I were still a child!"—she began to weep bitterly.

"There is no need of that, on my honor,"

replied Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck, angrily. "You are not only a child, but also a very foolish one. In the end you will just beg Constantine's pardon and dismiss your betrothed!"

"No; the last I will never do; but if Constantine is innocent, as a voice in my heart is always whispering to me, then I can not, really, be so base as not to beg him to forgive my weakness."

"You fool!" cried Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck, passionately, "I shall bless the hour when I deliver you over to the keeping of a husband, and shall be free of the care of guarding you, for your caprices are enough to drive one mad, if one were even gifted with Minerva's wisdom. Have I ever in the whole course of my life, rich as it is in experience, heard of such folly! To beg for forgiveness, when one should punish with dignified, cold contempt!—Yes only dare to believe the tales which he will think necessary to impose upon you, and I will never forgive you."

"But, dear, good mamma, how can I strictly forbid myself beforehand not to believe him? If he clearly proves his innocence—only just suppose it possible—how shall I defend myself, then?"

"Well, and if, after all, black were white, and the world were upside down," answered Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck; "even if what you suppose did happen, it does not much alter the matter: you do not require to defend yourself, and have in this case nothing further to say than that as appearances were so decidedly against him you could do nothing but consider your engagement as broken off. And he must also perceive this—"

"Broken off, without any explanation on one side?" said Henrietta, hesitatingly; "pardon me, but think, mamma, how is that practicable?"

"Is it not already done, my wise friend, who would teach her mother to think? But it is not worth while to make so much ado about nothing, his behavior speaks sufficiently against him. To try and make us believe that he was going to West-Gothland, and instead of that to carry on such a wicked game, positively I could fret myself to death when I think of his insolence; and I repeat, what I have already told you a hundred times, that never after this occurrence, let it end how it may, shall you receive my consent to marry him. Be, therefore, reasonable, Henrietta, and behave yourself with that calmness and that distant pride which punish an unworthy lover more than tears and anger."

Here the conversation between the two ladies was interrupted by the entrance of the maid with the supper.

"Well," said Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck, with a gracious nod, as she endeavored to cut off a wing of a wild-fowl, "what news have you in L——, my little girl? I have many acquaintances in the town; I should be pleased to hear something."

"God knows what would interest you, my lady. There happens here much that's delightful, and much that's sad. This week two of merchant O——'s children have been drowned. Last week notary L—— sent a bullet through his head, and died upon the spot—people say on account of an unfortunate love affair, and—" Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck interrupted her by impatiently waving her head.

"Enough, enough of the sad side! Is there no other news here?"

The damsel reflected a little.

"Ah, yes, 'tis true," she exclaimed, quickly; perhaps your ladyship knows the post-inspector, Von Spalden. Next Sunday, Miss Augusta, the most beautiful girl in all L——, will be called for the first time."

"Well," said Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck; "well, and whom does she marry, my child?"

"I thought the whole world must know that. Ever since February the affair has been incessantly discussed. At that time the heir's proxy arrived, and lived in this room; the heir was to follow, but he was dreadfully long of coming—"

"But, however, he came at last?" asked Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck again.

"Yes, after much uneasiness and apprehension he came at last, as he ought to have done long before; but your ladyship can believe me, there was such a fuss here. The Major met him at Helsingborg; and in the evening when they arrived here the post-inspector's house was illuminated from the front door even to the roof, and there were so many people outside and in, that many were nearly trodden to death; and a little child they had borrowed from Goldsmith Hjertberg's to represent an angel upon the altar, was very nearly burned."

"Heaven defend me from such trash," cried Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck; "but the suitor, my little maid, where did he go to?"

"Oh, he has been the whole time at the post-inspector's until a few days ago when they went away. The Major left the town an hour or two before, and since then nothing more has been heard of him."

"What!" cried Henrietta, springing hastily from her chair; "they have departed? Is the bridegroom gone?"

"Yes, but they are coming back again. At least the heir must be here to-morrow before eleven o'clock in the morning; for I know for certain that the bans are to be called to-morrow."

"But, my girl, do you know for certain which of the two gentlemen is to be the bridegroom?" asked Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck.

"Oh, yes, decidedly, my lady. It is the one who came last, the lively, handsome gentleman with the spectacles—the heir, as far as I know—no one doubts it in the whole of L——."

"Good, my little girl; then I don't doubt it either; we now require rest." Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck then gave her to understand by a gracious nod of the head that the examination was at an end. The maid gathered all the things upon her large tray, looked round the room once more to see if all were in proper order, courtesied, and then wished the ladies a good-night.

"At eight o'clock we will take coffee and fresh rolls."

"I get quite confused with all this; how will it all end?" said Henrietta, impatiently, when the girl had shut the door.

"To-morrow will show," replied the mamma, undressing herself; "good-night, Henrietta."

The light was put out, and a peevish hush, hush! put an end to all further communication. Henrietta sighed and wept, but length fell asleep thinking of traveling foreign countries, and the new lover.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE TRIAL.

THE night on which the above-described occurrence happened was spent in the most fearful anxiety by the Von Spalden family. The whole day the post-inspector, absorbed in deep thought, had marched up and down his room. The unexpected departure of his future son-in-law was not at all pleasing to him; but still he had sworn upon his honor to be back before Friday morning.

As long as the faintest gleam of daylight illumined the objects around, he kept his watch at the window, but hour after hour passed on, and the whole mass of street and houses became enveloped in the thick darkness of night, yet the one so eagerly expected did not appear.

"I'll be d—d," murmured the post-inspector, making his ear, like a patrol, relieve guard of his eyes. "I'll be d—d if I have ever spent such a night, with the exception of the one after the news of Blandin's bankruptcy arrived. Suppose he does not come, suppose some evil genius has been at work, suppose I have allowed myself by some means or other to be cheated! Ah! how cold it is!"

At this last thought the post-inspector shook with cold, anxiety, and violent anger. He recommenced his former rounds:

"Hem! if I could only understand how that fellow, the Major, can command such respect from me! I, who in my lifetime never trembled before any one, have now actually a torturing fear of him, and his interference in my affairs, but, above all, of his return. If only once the bans had been published, he might come when he pleased; but should he arrive before my son-in-law's

return, and with his 'certain points' thwart the affair—then—then." The post-inspector stamped his feet and ground his teeth. "Then I swear, as a man who knows how to keep his word, that he shall never, never get the girl, even though his diabolical arts should succeed!" And as the post-inspector, which is usually the case with irritable and violent dispositions, had worked himself up into a rage, and his anger without any actual cause had risen to the highest pitch, he, by way of lending more stress to his words, struck the table with his powerful hand, and crash fell to the ground glasses, decanters, inkstand, and many other things. After such an outbreak generally follows a sort of exhaustion, a gloomy calm. He silently took his stand at the window, and stared out into the darkness until the crowing of the cocks in the neighbors' yards announced the approach of the all-important day. Exhausted with fatigue he flung himself upon his bed, and was just about to yield to the craving of nature for rest, when the rolling of a carriage struck his ear. This time his hopes were not deceived; it was the heir who sprang from the vehicle. The post-inspector hastened to open the door for him, and conduct him into his room.

The fatigued traveler flung himself into a chair, stretched out his legs, and exclaimed irritably—

"Well truly, my honored father-in-law, you don't seem to have provided much for my comfort on arriving. With your permission it looks as if a troop of drunken peasants had been rioting here, while I was dreaming during my cold night journey of a nice little collation of hot coffee, &c., to put warmth into my frozen body."

"What the devil, Mr. Sterner!" said the post inspector, interrupting him with undisguised anger; "have we nothing else to think of now, but hot coffee and breakfast? I believe the Major has not yet arrived; for I sent yesterday evening to Hjertberg to inquire. Are you ready to accompany me to the clergyman as soon as decency permits us to set about such a matter?"

"That is understood, that is understood; but on my honor, I must first have some little refreshment, and then a few hours' rest. It is only just four o'clock, we have, therefore, time enough; I am going to my room, and before we set off, I wish to have a little sensible conversation with my bride that is to be."

"But I say," cried the post-inspector, rushing after him as he was disappearing through the door, "suppose the Major should come in the mean time, I am really uneasy. Are you perfectly sure that he won't make a scene?"

"You can be quite at ease in this respect," replied Sterner, with a confident smile that reassured the interrogator. "My cousin

neither can nor will prevent the will being carried out. What he said on that evening about it, is of no consequence to the case itself. That will go on all the same."

"All right, I understand," said Mr. Von Spalden, nodding his head in delight. "He is a great boaster; his words are as empty as wind."

"I think so, too," said young Sterner, with a roguish smile, and sprang up stairs.

"A weight has fallen from my heart?" murmured the post inspector as he went to his wife's room to see about procuring the wished for refreshment for his guest.

When he entered, the good woman was sitting upright in her bed with her night cap all awry, and her eyes red with weeping. She held in one hand the consoling snuff-box, and in the other a bottle of restorative drops.

"By Jove! what's the matter, Rigitza?" asked the post-inspector, half frightened at seeing his dear rib so exhausted and downcast, for the poor mother's anxiety and grief were to be traced in every feature. "What is the matter, I say? Is it thus you greet the day that shall put an end to all the misery and all the distress which have pursued us for so many years?"

"Alas, that will only begin to day, if—Oh God! my poor Augusta!" She began to weep bitterly.

"Pshaw, mere nonsense! all will go well!—our son-in-law has returned, and wishes some refreshment. See about it for him, my treasure, I am going to lie down for a few hours."

The kind manner in which the post inspector spoke was so unusual, that Mrs. Von Spalden came to the conclusion that there could no longer exist a hope of escape. However, she felt so comforted by the mildness of his tone, that without delay she hastened to execute the order she had received. But we will now take a peep at Augusta; what did she not suffer on that night, during which her eyes were not for one moment closed in refreshing sleep. She heard her father's steps echo in the little passage which separated their rooms, and easily imagined the cause of his uneasiness. Her heart beat violently and with anxious excitement at the slightest noise, and she clasped her delicate hands in fear when she heard with what frightful force the post-inspector thundered upon the table. These violent doings in the middle of the night, showed that his mind was in an over excited state, and should this continue until morning, Augusta well knew that neither persuasion, humility, nor obstinacy would have any effect upon him. She secretly cherished the hope that the hated heir would not return so soon, but this hope vanished when she recognized his step and voice, and heard how her father detained Sterner at the doorway, and even distinguished part of his an-

swer. Poor Augusta's head swam, and a death like coldness ran through her frame.

"Then he has not returned yet!" said she, softly. "Oh, Alexander, must I then be sacrificed! But without a severe struggle it shall not be," said she, resolutely. "I will dare every thing, and the Lord be thanked, I have still a few hours left."

Thus hope and despair fought a desperate battle in the heart of the poor young girl, and the faster the anxious hours passed on, the more was the former driven back; and a gloomy, silent desperation pitched her tent as the latter at length took possession of the dwelling-place.

The hand of the clock pointed to nine. Young Sterner entered dressed in an elegant black suit, doubtless worn in honor of the solemn importance of the day. He approached Augusta, who, pale and silent, sat on the sofa, looking like one of those marble statues created by the great artists of past ages, when they produce an ideal beauty in whose features were strangely united celestial calmness with earthly pain.

"My lovely *fiancée*," said he, softly, as he took her hand. "This hour is of importance to us both. I know that you do not love me. I frankly admit also, that in consequence of your coldness, and other circumstances, I too am willing that the tie which unites us should be dissolved; but still you know that this does not lie in my power. My honor, my word, the will, all combine, to render it impossible for me. Nothing remains for us then, Miss Von Spalden, but to submit with resignation to what Fate had decreed for us, ere we became acquainted with each other. If your father were not a hard hearted, obstinate, and selfish man, the matter could be very easily arranged; but under existing circumstances, this can not be the case. It is, therefore, also my wish, that the marriage should take place as soon as possible, because I hope that we should agree better with each other, when we are left to ourselves."

After a short pause, he added,

"At eleven o'clock, your father and I are going to the clergyman's. You know on what business, my dear Miss Von Spalden."

So saying, he kissed her hand and bowed politely.

"But, Mr. Sterner," said Augusta, with more composure than could have been expected after this honest confession; "you certainly heard the Major beg my father—yes, appeal to his conscience, to do no violence! What can give him a right to do so, I do not know. But wait, I beseech you, by all that's dear and sacred, only wait a little; he must be here soon, and then—"

"And then he can do nothing said Constantine, interrupting her, to all appearances highly enraged. "You will still have to marry the heir if you weep and complain till

your beautiful eyes lose their brilliancy. But if it should in some degree lessen your grief, I will confide to you that the happy one who possesses your heart, has his own good reasons for not letting any thing be heard of him until it suits him. Instead, according to his statement, of performing an urgent journey to the baths of —, I found him quite unexpectedly in Sorby Park, consoling a young sorrowing beauty, for whose sake he persuaded me, by a considerable pecuniary sacrifice, to save the house for the family, and to retrieve their disorderly affairs."

"It is very possible," replied Augusta, with icy coldness, "that he had his reasons for this; but if it is your intention to shake my faith by this piece of news, which was in no way called for, you have never wasted your trouble to less purpose."

The young man angrily bit his lip, and said in a cutting, sneering tone—

"If I am not misinformed the gentleman of whom we are speaking, never desired or requested your love and faith. Therefore, I think you should not be so punctilious in this respect. The whole romance will, as is the old custom, end with a wedding, and, perhaps, with two; for truly I have every reason to believe, indeed, I can even protest on my honor, that Miss Von Stalkrona is beloved with an ardor which would make it possible for her admirer to give up his claims to Miss Von Spalden."

"Fie, Mr. Sterner, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!" replied Augusta, proudly, and her cheeks and brow glowed with anger. "It is unworthy and unmanly to scoff at my sorrow, and to insult a weak woman; but it is in the highest degree vile and degrading thus to abuse the confidence of him who has honored you with the name of friend. I, for my part, abhor and despise you; your endeavors to awaken suspicion in my mind are fruitless; and, to be perfectly sincere, I will tell you, that although he has not asked my love still he has it—simply because it is impossible to deprive him of it; and the knowledge you have acquired respecting my regard for the Major, and on which you dwell without the slightest delicacy, has certainly never been confided to you to make such an unworthy use of."

"What words are those?" asked the post-inspector, who at this moment came in from the passage, where he had heard Augusta's answer. "What words are those to your future lord and master?" Then turning to Sterner, he continued, "I should advise my good friend to adopt a more serious tone. The girl resembles her mother, when I married her—she had quite the same ways; for tears and opposition are woman's elements: one ought to know how to treat them properly. Indulgence is good for nothing. As I said, my wife was just so also;

but the Lord be thanked! I have broken her in; she is now as sensible a wife as any who is born to obey her husband."

"And you could wish your daughter to drag on her life in such a way?" asked Augusta, without reflecting what an insult to her father lay in these words; but her trembling showed that she now perceived that she had been too bold. He had very nearly laid violent hands upon her.

"What do you dare to say?" roared the enraged father; but he curbed himself on remembering his son-in-law, and perceiving the impropriety of his passion, he added, somewhat less severely: "Has not your mother been one of the happiest of wives, although *you* have now and then been the cause of rousing my anger?"

During his speech Augusta had gradually retreated to the opposite end of the room, where a door led to the dining-room.

"Stay, Augusta," added the post-inspector, more mildly; "you should behave to-day as becomes a good and obedient child. You know, my daughter, that I love you, though sometimes I am hasty; that is only my nature. Although we contemplate it from different points of view, yet your happiness, Augusta, has always been my first thought, and the object of all my endeavors: this day I shall see these accomplished. Therefore it is my wish, and my desire—my desire, mark, Augusta—that you now, in the presence of your father, should allow your bridegroom to kiss you. Now, do not blush, and do not grasp the door-handle so eagerly; a modest maiden should always be bashful, but affection you know I can not endure."

"Dear papa, spare me, for Heaven's sake! it is certainly no affection, but—I can not! it is impossible for me—I can not let him kiss me."

"You simpleton!" said the post-inspector, and he actually laughed, which was rarely the case with him. "You can not kiss him, and yet you must marry him. Do you believe then that this young gentleman will content himself with such excuses when you are his wife?"

Women often show at any dangerous crisis, or when, to all appearances, inevitable danger threatens them, a power of soul and presence of mind for which, on calm reflection, they would hardly give themselves credit. The delicate feelings of the maiden were hurt by the rude despotism of the father, and in Augusta's soul awoke the slumbering spirit of pride and self-reliance. She said, in a firm tone:

"Father, you force me for the first time openly to dispute your will, and to declare to you, that the marriage with the husband you have selected for me shall never take place. You may adopt what measures you please, but remember that there still remains

a resource for me—publicly to refuse the marriage, and even at the altar to say *no*."

"If you do that," exclaimed the post-inspector, blue with anger, "we shall still find means to quell your spirit! But now, first of all, do what I have ordered you; or else—You know *me*, Augusta! Do not excite me to some act of violence which you might regret!"

"My dear Miss Von Spalden," said Sterner, approaching politely, "submit this once to what is necessary; your father is not master of himself at this moment: prefer, therefore, a lesser to a greater evil."

"There can be no greater evil," said Augusta, "and I will not submit to it. Oh! my father, have mercy on your child! Never yet have my lips touched those of another man but yours, and *this* Sterner shall not be the first."

"Oh, then, with the other, you would not have made such a fuss?" said the post-inspector, growing furious; "but we shall see if I can not teach you obedience."

He went hastily up to her, and stretched out his hand to seize the trembling girl, when the door suddenly opened, and Augusta, who was about to fly from the room, fell into the Major's outstretched arms, who clasped her to his heart, and bore her to the other end of the dining-room.

CHAPTER XLIX.

CONFUSION.

For some minutes the post-inspector stood undecided how he should act under present circumstances. He had never read or heard of a father placed in such a peculiar situation, at the moment when his paternal authority and immovable will were about to achieve their greatest triumph; that that odious man should enter as if fallen from the clouds, to destroy his whole labor! and, as if he, the father, were a nonentity, to clasp the girl in his arms even under his paternal nose; and then, forsooth to exclaim, "Calm yourself, my beloved girl! you rest on the heart of him who hopes soon to be your husband! Forgive me, Augusta, all the painful hours which I have caused you by this trial; you have withstood the trial nobly, you have fulfilled my hopes far beyond even my expectation; and you have won a claim to the love and gratitude of my whole life."

These words fell on the ears of the astonished post-inspector, and before his eyes matters were by no means clearer. The Major pressed kiss after kiss upon Augusta's lips and brow, and she not only allowed this liberty, but seemed so intensely happy, that the post-inspector's exasperation reached the highest pitch. "It is incomprehensible," thought he, "that I do not annihilate both

in the excess of fury into which I am thrown by this insult." Yet the post-inspector made no attempt toward doing so; there was a certain something which prevented him from approaching the audacious Major. At length, in this difficulty, his thoughts fell upon the heir. He looked round to discover this object of his last hope; and behold! there he stood contemplating the happy pair; but he appeared only surprised, and a smile of heart-felt and sympathizing joy played round his lips.

The post-inspector thought he might dare to speak boldly to him. He began, therefore, in his usual rough manner: "Zounds, sir! are you a man? no, there never was a more dastardly coward! there you stand gaping, while another clasps your bride in his arms. Is that in accordance with the honor of a gentleman? You ought to be ashamed of yourself that you have not spirit enough to venture to chastise this violence."

"Excuse me," said the young gentleman, laughing. "Why don't you, as her father, see to the matter? she is still under your paternal authority. I have nothing more to do with it, my part is at an end."

"Your obedient servant, there are two words to that, my young sir! If you fancy that because of *that* simpleton I am going to let the heir slip through my fingers, you deceive yourself."

With these words the post-inspector turned away from him, and made for his daughter and the Major, describing with large steps a circle round them, which circle became narrower and narrower the closer the happy pair clung to each other, and in the ratio that his fury increased.

"Major Sterner," said he, and his voice trembled with the mighty effort it cost him to make it somewhat calmer, "have the goodness to keep your hands off my daughter!"

The lovers heard and saw nothing; the steps became larger, and the circle narrower.

"Sir, I should think you ought to have a little respect for the wishes of a father, and the rights of the master of the house."

A fiery kiss upon Augusta's hand, and a long whisper in her ear, was the only answer to the post-inspector's summons.

The circle had so considerably contracted, that the post-inspector touched the Major, and the next moment probably fury would have driven the excited father to violence, if Augusta, who was the first to awaken from her ecstasy to the consciousness of what was passing around her, had not quickly whispered to the Major:

"O, Alexander, it is my father!" With these words she gently pushed her too happy lover away.

The Major suddenly recollected himself, and turning round with calm self-confidence, and much dignity, said, "Mr. Von Spalden, forgive us, if in the first flush of our mutual

happiness, we forgot every one but ourselves! forgive us, if we perhaps expressed the excess of our bliss in a manner, which should not have happened until the right to do so had been sanctioned by your paternal blessing; for, with your permission, I will easily explain—"

"I have demanded no explanation from you, sir," shouted the post-inspector, feeling his courage, at the same time his suppressed wrath rising, in consequence of the quietness, the almost submissiveness of the Major's tone; "what are you saying about 'mutual happiness,' 'excess of bliss,' 'paternal blessing,' and other such trash? what have I to do with *your* happiness, and what is my paternal blessing to *you*? If you take it into your head to fancy that I am going to give my daughter to a dismissed adventurer, either *you* are a fool, or you must think *me* one!" Then he stamped his foot upon the floor and continued; "as surely as I live, that girl shall marry the heir, though I should have to drag her to the altar myself!"

"Nor will I dispute that," replied Sterner, scarcely able to subdue his inclination to laugh. "If it only pleases Mr. Von Spalden."

Here Sterner was interrupted by several voices proceeding from the ante-chamber. The folding doors flew open, and to the unspeakable surprise of every one, Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck and Henrietta stood in the middle of the dining-room.

"How now?" cried Mr. Von Spalden, in the most absurd tone of perplexity and astonishment. "One scene is worse than the other! From whence do you come madame so *à propos* or rather so *mal à propos*?—ah—the light is dawning upon me; the gentleman who came here last spring, and behaved himself so like a noodle, was perhaps the right one; or in heaven's name sister Louisa, why are you here?"

"Oh! I will tell you, my poor, simple brother," answered Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck, giving him her hand with an air of pity that was calculated to drive the excited and excitable man to perfect madness. "I came here to tell you what the whole world knows: that you allow yourself to be treated like a fool, that you have been led by the nose, that every Christian laughs in his sleeve at you; that the man, who is standing yonder is no more the heir than your black poodle. But if you wish to know who he is, I must tell you that he was the betrothed of my daughter; but the Lord be thanked, we despise him."

She then rushed forward, and violently tore the brown wig and spectacles from their owner, and said with a sneering smile as she courted him to him:

"Your servant, Lieutenant Constantine! I congratulate you upon your beautiful gipsy complexion, the inheritance and the *fiancée*,

which are all alike false; but you must know, sir, that I found means and ways of collecting news about the particulars of your journey into West-Gothland, and that I have learned one and all of your pretty deceptions. As to you, my brother, I am heartily sorry for you, that in your old age people should point at you as the most consummate donkey that ever was created with long ears."

During this scene the Major whispered in broken sentences an explanation to the astonished Augusta, and at the conclusion of Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck's polite speech, Lieutenant Constantine laughingly approached his former betrothed, who, according to her mother's commands, turned her back upon him with cold disdain.

"By heavens!" said Constantine, "you may believe my word, I am innocent, dear Henrietta! and the old well-known voice, which was once so dear to her, induced her to turn, and to look full in his somewhat reguish, but honest eyes. "Believe me, I swear by my honor, I have never done an unworthy action, or made myself unworthy of your love. But you, Henrietta, how have you kept your faith?"

"I had no longer any faith to keep with you, Constantine; you who could deceive me, and that you decidedly did do; for even if you loved me alone, still you allowed yourself to pass before all L—— as my cousin's betrothed, and such a trick, mamma says, is a sin before God and man. I will, therefore, tell you the worst at once, namely, that if you were ever so innocent, and I verily believe that you are, for I perceive who has induced you to commit these follies, it would be of no use to you now. You must pay for your unpardonable weakness; for, supposing you to be faithless, I have engaged myself to another."

"So, so, my angel, nothing worse?" answered Constantine, according to Henrietta's opinion, in a highly improper and unexpected manner. "Then there remains nothing for us to do, but mutually to congratulate each other. By way of thanks for your confidence, permit me to inform you, that I am nearly, that is to say, as far as lies in my power, in the same position as yourself."

"Ah, you are only joking, Constantine," said Henrietta, laughing and offering him her hand in token of perfect reconciliation; "we all know who is to get the young lady."

"With your permission," replied the Lieutenant, "there are more young ladies in the world than the one you mean, but you will hear further at some future day."

But what were the post-inspector and his haughty sister doing in the mean time? the reader has a right to ask, since they have so long remained unnoticed. Gracious reader, I answer, I am ready to satisfy your just curiosity. Turn your looks from the young people just described, let them stay in the back-

ground of the room; you see in an arm-chair the fainting form of a gentleman, it is our old friend the post-inspector, who is lying there. The last blow which his amiable sister had given him, but in particular the painful appellation of "donkey!" had shaken him like an electric shock. His strength was exhausted, and there he lay, thrown by this excess of grief and anger, into a merciful state of stupefaction. His good better half held his head against her breast, and bathed it with vinegar, with which she mingled her tears. Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck held a bottle of eau de Cologne under his nose, and Augusta with anxious solicitude helped her mother in her endeavors to restore him.

At length Mr. Von Spalden began to revive, and the first words which passed his lips were:—"Donkey! I, I, the post-inspector Von Spalden, a donkey!"

He rose from his seat, and glanced round the room with perplexed looks. "This man, whom I have received into my house as my own son, is he then not the heir, and was I a fool! Was the will, the letter, and all the rest only a trick? Oh, poor old man that I am, that I should live to see this day of sorrow and misery! Speak then for Heaven's sake! Why do you all stand gaping at me, speak, speak! is there then no heir?"

The Major now stepped forward and said: "Yes, Mr. Von Spalden, here he stands before you, and let me entreat you to forgive me all the uneasiness which I have caused in your house, and to your paternal heart. It is I, who under the appearance of the proxy, wished to become acquainted with, and win the heart of my intended, and in this manner to have an opportunity of more closely judging of my future relations."

"So, so," said the post-inspector, and a quick flush of mischievous joy passed over his features. "Well, it strikes me, you attained that soon enough, and therefore I should like to know what the young gentleman there wanted here, as my sister properly remarked, to make me the laughing-stock of the whole town?"

"The last," replied the Major, with a scarcely perceptible smile, "could naturally never have been my intention; but the first, as well as every thing that may appear strange to you, I will entirely explain, if you will kindly give me your attention."

He calmly seated himself, drew a chair for Augusta near him, and, out of pure curiosity, Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck and Henrietta seated themselves also.

Lieutenant Constantine, knowing every particular as well as the Major himself, went up to his own room, to wash off the dark olive color from his cheeks; and he felt not a little contented when his own fair complexion made its re-appearance, slightly shaded by a light forest of golden curls.

"Upon my honor!" merrily exclaimed he, smiling at his own form in the glass, "as I now am, she will not long withstand me." He locked up his paint, spectacles and wig. "I thank you, dear relics," comically said he; "without these blessed apparatus, Henrietta would have had no such good excuse to break with me! I verily feel a desire to embrace the capital fellow, who has helped me to procure the liberty for which I so ardently longed. Oh, if I should succeed! at the mere thought of it, I should like to embrace the whole of mankind!"

He then threw himself upon the sofa, and began to project plans how he should conquer Wilhelmina Von Stalkrona's heart, and what improvements should be made in Sorrbj Park. For the latter, an attack was to be made upon the Major's cash, which could not possibly fail, for Alexander was the best of friends. Amidst such agreeable, waking dreams, our hero at length sank into a sweet slumber.

CHAPTER L.

THE EXPLANATION.

"I CAN not deny," began the Major, after his auditors had seated themselves in due order, "I can not deny that I have always cherished a certain bias toward enthusiasm, particularly in all that concerns the divine feeling, in which our weakness and strength are so often blended. This has kept me from making an early choice, and from that thoughtless flight from flower to flower, which, in the present time generally marks the entrance of a young man on the great drama of life. I created to myself an imaginary image, which the woman I wished for my companion through life should resemble. My exacting soul required all the best qualities of the heart and mind, at the same time that I felt I could not dispense with personal beauty. My beau ideal continued to exist in my mind, without withering in the rose-garden of fancy. I became acquainted with many beautiful girls, but none corresponded to my ideas, and my heart was becoming contracted. Possibly I may have expected too much. The virtues, the freshness of feeling, and the sympathy in tastes, which I sought, were nowhere to be found. I became out of humor and distrustful, and daily more and more convinced that I should never find the original of the image I bore in my heart. But the dreams of my youth were somewhat dispelled by the trials of manhood. I was depressed by manifold cares and adversities, which exercised an unfavorable influence upon my disposition and feelings; still, the latter did not entirely die like so many of the golden soap-bubbles of youth, whose brilliant sparkling

colors, fade under the chilly hand of cold experience."

The Major was silent for a minute; Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck seized the opportunity to whisper to her brother: "The man is decidedly an incorrigible fool with his '*rose gardens*,' and '*golden soap-bubbles*.'"

"I wish he would come to the point," replied the post-inspector, peevishly shaking his head. "All that he is treating us to now, is mere balderdash."

"Doubtless the present company are aware," recommenced Sterner, "of the cause which induced me some years ago to travel into foreign countries; but even should this not be the case," added he, as he perceived from the post-inspector's air and gestures that he wished to dispute his conjecture, "I must pass it over in silence, partly because it is too long a story, and partly because it has nothing to do with our present affairs. To be brief, my so long cherished wish to see the New World was accomplished; but as this is not the place for the adventures of my journey, with the exception of the one which is connected with more recent events, I shall pass over them also."

"I had been some time in North America when I determined to pay a visit to the interior of the country. On this journey I had the happiness of becoming acquainted with the post-inspector's brother, the noble and upright Rudolph Von Spalden. It was natural that countrymen meeting in a distant part of the world should become intimate, and deeply feel the pleasure and charm of such a union. We became inseparable. Mr. Von Spalden, who was very fond of tiger-hunting (and perhaps trusted too much to his dexterity and to the good fortune which had attended him in his younger and more powerful years, in this, his favorite amusement), once induced me to participate in this sport."

"We set off, accompanied by seventeen or eighteen of the natives, and provided with necessary arms and provisions. Wherever we penetrated, there appeared traces of several wild animals; and we found abundance of inferior game, such as deer, wild boar and innumerable birds. We pitched our tent for the night in a rocky, but tolerably open country, lighted a fire, spread out the food we had brought with us, ate, drank, smoked and rested by turns. Our hunt was to begin at the break of day. Some of our scouts, who had already been out to reconnoitre, returned with favorable news, and we set off in the hopes of a good hunt. We came to an extremely thick copse, where by the torn-up ground, and the trodden-down grass, we without difficulty traced the powerful paw of the tiger or jaguar, as the American tiger ought more properly to be called. Here Mr. Von Spalden divided his

troop into three divisions, who, at some distance from each other, worked forward through the openings. We were all on foot and in high spirits; although it was a wild and gloomy place, which might well have inspired the most courageous with a feeling of horror. Von Spalden and I did not go together. He had commissioned me to penetrate into the thicket along with four natives, at about two hundred yards' distance from the point where he himself entered. We had penetrated about twenty or thirty yards, when we perceived close to us a young tiger, who set himself in a position as if he were going to fall upon us. I, who was quite inexperienced in this kind of hunting, made ready to fire upon him; but the natives winked to me to wait, and one of them whispered in my ear that I should rather keep the shot for the tigress, who would surely be near at hand. At this moment we heard her roaring, and as it appeared to us, proceeding from the spot from whence we had come. I crept softly back, while my companions continued to press further into the thicket, without paying the slightest attention to the young tiger.

"When I came to the end of the thicket, so that I had a clear view of the open plain, I discovered the tigress at a short distance from me. The proud and beautiful animal foamed with rage, as she violently lashed her tail against her loins. Her attention seemed fixed upon only one object, which she approached with stealthy, cautious steps. I followed the direction of her fiery glances, and beheld Von Spalden, standing close up against a tree, between some bushes, with his gun all ready cocked. Deliberately, but with strained attention, he watched each movement of the approaching tigress, and appeared to wait for the moment when she should crouch down, before springing forward, as is usual with these animals. I did not know if I should advance or not, and watched, with uneasiness, these preparations for the decisive moment. At length the tigress stood still, and at that instant Von Spalden fired his two shots. The animal made a frightful spring, straight in the air, and fell down upon the same spot, to all appearance lifeless. Von Spalden ran swiftly forward, but hastened as quickly back, flung his gun over his shoulder, and scrambled up the tree. The tigress jumped up, plunged at the tree with staggering but quick springs, and followed her enemy up the trunk. I tremblingly hastened forward, not from fear of the animal, but from anxiety for my friend's life. Von Spalden had slung his arm round the lowest branch, and was just going to swing himself up, when the tigress seized him with one paw, and fixed her terrible claws in her enemy's leg, but appeared so exhausted that she could not climb up further. At this moment I reached the foot of the tree; but

still some seconds of intense anxiety were passed, while I sought out the proper place to fire, without injuring my friend. At length I succeeded in finding a safe mark; I fired, and the ball entered close under the right ear of the tigress, who fell lifeless, bringing, however, Von Spalden down along with her, sadly torn.

"With the help of the natives, who had, by this time, returned with two young tigers, we bandaged Von Spalden's wounds, as well as we could, plaited a tolerably comfortable litter of branches, laid him upon it, and carried him to our place of encampment. Not being dangerously wounded, he was so far recovered the following day, as to allow of our commencing our march homewards. The noble man never forgot the service I had had an opportunity of rendering him. He offered me his friendship, a place in his vacant heart, whose springs had been so early laid waste; he begged me to be his son, his all—and I—(the Major brushed a tear from his eye) I endeavored, during the three subsequent years that we lived together, to cheer the last days of his lonely life. The better we became acquainted, the more strongly we became attached, and the more we learned to value each other.

"At length Mr. Von Spalden removed to Hamburg where he lived in a most retired manner. He had entirely given up business, and it seemed to me as if a certain unusual melancholy had seized upon his spirits, which caused him latterly to think over, and dwell upon every thing that related to his early life, more than had been his habit, but, in all else he remained the same. Nothing, in the way of business, however intricate, escaped his clear-sighted and experienced eye."

At these words the Major's eyes fell, as if by accident, upon Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck, who felt her old cheeks redden when she thought of Lieutenant Constantine's unfortunate mission, and of the silent triumph which the hateful Major enjoyed. He, in the mean time, calmly continued:

"He never spoke of his property or his will; but very frequently during the last months in the tranquil evening hours, he described to me in the most lively colors, the bright dreams and hopes of his early youth. He dwelt long and with pleasure upon these remembrances of the past; he told me of his relations and of the promise he had given to his brother and sister-in-law during his last stay in Sweden, namely the promise to remember Augusta, whom he described as a little fairy, a sweet and beautiful child, whose future welfare he had much at heart. 'I vowed to provide for her and I will keep my word,' he used often to say. 'Happiness is not always united to earthly possessions; I will do something better for her. Augusta shall bless my

memory, and so shall you also, Alexander, you whom I love, as if you were my own son.'

"I little thought then the meaning of these words. In the mean time he visibly declined, the most skillful physicians were called in, but they all shrugged their shoulders and hoped that the malady might abate. Thus he easily perceived that there was no hope. 'It is well,' said he with a smile; 'I am weary of life and sorrow; you must not regret me more than is right, my son, even if you see me set out on my last journey.' Still he was not obliged to keep his bed, and it was only gradually that death poured its poison into his veins. About this time Constantine arrived in Hamburg. The great pleasure which we felt at meeting (for the friendship between my cousin and myself had grown up with us) induced Mr. Von Spalden to offer Constantine the use of his house and table for as long as it pleased him. With deep sorrow we witnessed how Mr. Von Spalden's sufferings daily increased, and I soon stood in the full consciousness of my loss at his deathbed.

"I received his blessing, and his last words were, 'you must take my greeting to Rigitza and tell her that I have been true to her even till death. Her image has accompanied me through my whole life, and she will be my last thought. Alexander, you must love and honor her like a tender son, and make Augusta the happiest of women. The mother will recover happiness in seeing that of her daughter, and her gratitude may perhaps draw a tear from her to my memory.'

"Clearly perceiving what at that moment he wished, I pressed his hand, over which was already creeping the coldness of death, to my heart and lips, and swore by all that is sacred to try to win the heart of her, whose happiness he had confided to my honor and my care. A smile on his pale lips told me that he had understood and accepted my vow. Once more his expiring eyes gave me a look of adieu, and his spirit soared aloft to where he will hereafter demand an account from me of the fulfillment of my pledge.

"The day after the funeral, the will was opened. With unfeigned astonishment I found myself in possession of his considerable property. The conditions were all in my favor; but it also concerned the interest of another person, who in case I had already made another choice, would have been the sufferer. My old enthusiastic visions were awakened with renewed strength. To marry so late in life without knowing any thing of the character, the heart, and the other qualities of the lady selected for me, did not appear to me the most desirable of all things. After I had reflected on the matter, and considered how I should discover some reason-

able method of learning what I wished, before I made my appearance as a suitor, I persuaded Constantine, who now had no further reason to stay in Hamburg, to remain as my agent, to see about arranging the affairs of the deceased, proving the will, &c.; while I, on the other hand, went to Sweden, as an envoy from myself, and in this character to win the desired information. To give the matter a more creditable appearance, my letter was sent off along with a copy of the will, in which I merely left out my title and Christian name Alexander. These innocent deviations were necessary for my plan; my identity could at any time be proved by referring to the original will, in which my name and title were given in full.

"I now come to the affair of the portrait, Constantine had given one into my charge to carry to Miss Von Stolzenbeck. It occurred to me to pass this off as the portrait of the heir, partly because my mission would thus acquire more semblance of reality, partly to tempt Augusta by the youthful and pleasing picture of my cousin, while I was trying to win her heart for myself. To this aim I employed every means, which I did not consider unworthy and contrary to my honor. But in my letter to Augusta I greatly recommended my proxy, and begged her to bestow on him all the confidence the matter required. However, I mentioned nothing of this to Constantine. Probably at that time he would not have agreed to assist my plan, and besides I was not quite certain, how far I should myself carry my romantic ideas.

"On my arrival at L—; I met Mrs. Von Spalden at the post-office by some happy chance. There I made the discovery, that my future relations were in somewhat straitened circumstances; another cause for me to be particular in my trial of the young lady's way of thinking; for how often has woman not shown herself weak by the enticement of riches, and consented to wear chains merely because they were of gold!"

At these words, the Major cast a hasty glance at Henrietta and continued:

"This was what I most feared; but even my first meeting with Augusta spoke to my heart. I had the happiness of saving her from a disagreeable situation upon the ice. She neither fainted from fright, nor screamed from feigned modesty, when I bore her away in my arms; her heroism pleased me extremely, and still more the bashfulness which brought a blush to her cheeks when she looked at me, and our looks told that we recognized each other."

"Good heavens," said Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck, interrupting him, "how could you recognize each other? Ah! I understand, instinct, a secret presentiment, such as the kindred spirits of the blessed school of Lafontaine felt for each other," added she ironically.

"No, with your permission, amiable madam, it was by no means what your superfine sagacity has so ingeniously devised, but we recognized each other from the usual simple reason, because we had seen each other the evening before. Being anxious to watch all my Augusta's steps, I had hired a room directly opposite the house the post-inspector then lived in. Fortune so favored me, that Augusta's little room was just *vis-à-vis* to mine; and as they were of the same height, I could see into hers, for which purpose I used to keep mine dark. How my heart beat, how my cheeks glowed, when I saw her enter for the first time! She stood at the window, and looked up at the stars; she clasped her hands; she appeared to be praying. I felt a strange sympathy with her; I even then perceived that I should certainly be able to love this beautiful being, the loveliness of whose countenance I could, even in that uncertain light, discern. She played and sang, and my voice mingled with hers, almost without my own knowledge. I thought I had never been so happy as at that moment, for I knew that she for whom I already cherished such interest, was destined to be my wife, and *would* be so, if I could win her heart; for without that her hand would have been worthless to me. But to return, Augusta had heard my voice, and approached the window, where, in the clear moonlight, she perceived her unknown neighbor! With the most delightful embarrassment she hastily drew down the blind."

Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck nodded approval to Augusta, and the Major continued:

"I can not describe to you the anxiety which I experienced when I delivered Constantine's portrait to her. I longed to penetrate into her very soul, and the few moments she contemplated it appeared to me an eternity; but the Lord be thanked! her first words convinced me that I had nothing to fear there. It would be too tedious to you all, were I to follow the course of my various feelings since then, nor will I repeat all the means which I employed to test the nobleness and strength of Augusta's character, and the purity and constancy of the fervent love, with which I had been—without clothing my feelings in words—so happy as to inspire her, for the character of proxy to another, which I had taken upon myself, forbid me to make open pretensions to her heart. My passion was kept in such subjection by my will, that it seldom broke forth, still, perhaps it was more evident than accorded with the odd double character which I had taken upon myself. I am astonished that Augusta's patience did not waver. Even before Constantine's arrival, I intended to get him to appear in the person of the heir, to put Augusta's female vanity to the greatest test, and to try her faith and confidence in me. Constantine's unexpected appearance here

had nearly destroyed all. I had written him of my plan, but in the mean while he had been seized by a fit of home-sickness, and arrived in L— quite unexpectedly; thus, by the affair of the portrait, of which he knew nothing, putting all sorts of fancies in the post-inspector's as well as my little Augusta's head. Luckily he understood my hint, and perceived that something must be in the wind. I asked him after a third cousin in Hamburg, who never existed; he showed more presence of mind and quickness than I had dared to hope for. When we were afterward quietly seated together in my room, I opened my heart to him, and induced him to take a part in the plan which I then unfolded to him, and which we subsequently carried out. I made him give me a sacred promise to preserve silence on the subject toward the young lady to whom he was then engaged; moreover, I made him swear on his honor, to tempt Augusta in every possible manner, and faithfully to acquaint me with his progress. It was my intention to try Augusta's constancy until the bans were to be publicly called. Had she wavered, I would have ceded to her the whole inheritance. But she would never have become my wife, and we should have separated forever, if Constantine had received the slightest mark of favor from her. I acknowledge that it was a hazardous, a much too hazardous experiment; but what I have myself suffered during this period from uncertainty, and from self-reproach, for so tormenting my poor Augusta, may, perhaps, in some degree make up for the great uneasiness my desire of investigation has caused her and you. I will willingly admit that I am happier, much happier than my selfish way of acting and my distrust deserved, and I fervently thank God that my Augusta has passed through this *purgatory* as pure as an angel. She was even tried by the news that my heart belonged to another lady, but nothing shook her faith. And what passed this morning I shall never forget!

"According to our agreement Constantine called for me shortly before he visited Augusta. As the post-inspector was sleeping off the anxiety of the night, I succeeded in reaching the dining-room unperceived. Here I heard her conversation with my cousin as well as the one with her father, and my heart beat with unspeakable joy when I heard her declare that she would say *no* at the altar, and refuse to comply with her father's unreasonable command. At that moment I saw all my wishes fulfilled, and was just about to enter when she herself threw open the door, and my beloved, tormented *fiancée* rested on my happy heart. The only person who has suffered from this whole affair, is Constantine. His friendly service to me, drew upon him suspicions, which my explanation has cleared up too late, because he is already robbed of that which was dearest to him; for,

as I have heard with regret and unfeigned astonishment, his betrothed has made these suspicions the plea for justifying her breach of faith."

CHAPTER LI.

HOW A GENTLEMAN AND FATHER RESTORES HIS FALLEN AUTHORITY.

A LONG silence reigned in the room when the Major had ceased to speak. The post-inspector, who during its progress had taken his pipe, and had gradually recovered himself, cleared his throat from time to time with a force which evinced that his body had regained its strength, and his thoughts their usual course. That something very important and grand occupied him, was testified by the thick clouds of smoke which he solemnly puffed toward the ceiling. Mrs. Von Spalden had wept both her apron and pocket-handkerchief wet, at the remembrance of the blessed Rudolph's last greeting. She now held in her trembling hand the only remaining dry corner before her eyes, and sobbed violently.

Augusta, whose cheeks glowed with pleasure and bashfulness, buried her charming little head in her small white hands, and the Major looked as if he had already here below attained the joys of celestial bliss. He endeavored to draw away Augusta's hand, and so far succeeded that her cheek rested on his shoulder, to the great annoyance of Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck, who sat opposite to them, and, as she backed her chair from one side to the other, thought of the justice of Aunt Agneta's complaint:—"Modesty, thou beautiful virtue, what in Heaven's name has become of thee?" She could not quite decide which of the company most deserved her anger and hatred; whether the Major, who with such ridiculous, solemn seriousness unveiled such a host of follies, for any one of which he deserved to be put in a mad-house, and whose interference in Henrietta's affairs stamped him as a most dangerous, and, moreover, highly impolite person, who did not possess enough tact to comprehend the arrangements and circumstances of the fashionable world; or her brother, who had so totally and entirely forgotten the little manners he once possessed, as regardlessly to puff his abominable tobacco-smoke straight into her face; or Augusta, who, sitting aside all female decorum, was so bold as to take such a position before her aunt's very face; or, lastly, her sister-in-law, who had committed the extraordinary fault of neglecting the first duty of a hostess, namely, offering refreshments to her guests.

She cast a glance at Henrietta, to signify to her, by some sign, how annoyed she was with every body and every thing. But vain

were her signs; no answering nod showed that Henrietta had understood her meaning; she seemed struck by the same fate that visited Lot's wife; at least no pillow of salt could have been more mute and motionless than Henrietta. The difference between her and Augusta's conduct, stood in clear, but painful characters before her mind's eye. Sterner's last remark had deeply impressed her; but this was no time for soft-hearted repentance, for it was evident that Constantine bore his loss with great firmness; indeed, it seemed to be a great relief to him, and the Major's esteem was forever lost. Henrietta felt the latter much more acutely than Constantine's fickleness. She wished to be far, far away from these people, and remembrance of this day's scene, the most humiliating she had ever experienced. It was charged with three highly disagreeable facts; the first, her lover's great, almost cheerful, indifference to her—the second, the displeasure, perhaps contempt, of an honest and true friend! and lastly, worst of all to bear, she had seen that another woman had been commended on account of her virtues, with far more ardent enthusiasm than had ever been bestowed on hers.

But now every one's train of thought was turned into another direction. The post-inspector shoved back his chair with considerable noise, put down his pipe, rose and went with majestic steps toward the side where Sterner sat. Sterner got up quickly, bowed respectfully, and as they thus stood opposite to each other, the post-inspector began to speak in an unusually soft but firm and quiet voice.

"Major Alexander Constantine Von Sterner, heir of the property left by my deceased brother, I have listened with quiet and proper respect to the explanation which you have given. I will believe that the object of this farce was only to satisfy an absurd and extravagant fancy, and it does not belong to me to judge how far these excesses of imagination agree with the calm dignity of a sensible man, I shall merely express my sentiments on the matter as far as it has any reference to myself, my family, my position as a respectable citizen, and my paternal authority. Your romantic notions have had sad consequences. They have excited uneasiness and confusion in my house, and will, unfortunately, call forth much ridicule from the public. You have also exercised a highly injurious influence over my daughter's filial obedience, and her love to him whom Nature has ordained as her guide; I will, therefore, give you an example how a gentleman and an offended father restores his lost authority. As you know, there is a clause in the will which can not be disputed. It runs thus—

"If on the side of my brother's daughter there arise objections to the above-mentioned alliance, then, the whole of my property

shall devolve on the above-named Sterner, unless it be his pleasure, of his own free will, to cede a small part of it to her.'

"Now, in her name, and in my own, as her father, and the disposer of her hand, I herewith most solemnly renounce the honor and the advantage of that union, which my deceased brother mentions in his will, and at the same time pronounce you free from the part which depends upon your generosity. The law can have no plea for any objection to this arrangement. I have merely now to request that you will do me the favor (the sooner the better) of leaving my house."

At the conclusion of this speech, the most powerful, the longest and the best which the post-inspector had ever made, he bowed with a cold smile, which almost seemed to say—"Now answer that if you can!"

All eyes were turned to the Major, and Augusta felt that a shudder ran through her frame. After a short silence, Sterner replied, as he cast an assured look round the company, on whom his calm bearing and self-command had made a favorable impression:

"Mr. Von Spalden! as far as your declaration concerns the application of the law to the will, it is quit indisputable; but I pray you to remember that the laws themselves, to which you appeal, justify the marriage of a daughter, if a father misuse the power and authority vested in him. The obedience of a daughter to her father rests upon the love and esteem which Nature has planted in every reasonable being toward parents, and not upon bondage. No law commands her to sacrifice her peace and happiness in life, to the selfish humor of a despot, even though that despot is her father. I therefore seriously beg you to be assured, that all objections and arguments which you might bring forward, would be of no avail. Allow yourself to be persuaded to be reasonable—this will be to our mutual advantage and happiness; for, as true as there is a God above us, I will take Augusta to Sorby as my beloved wife, before the green leaves have become yellow."

This answer, which was so exactly opposite to what the post-inspector expected, threw him into another awkward embarrassment. How should he retain the high imperious tone which he had assumed? He had reckoned that his cold, bitter declaration would have flung Sterner into a violent passion, would have produced a sense of insulted honor, but as this did not happen, he perceived that it would be extremely difficult to hold such an antagonist exactly where he wished. He answered, therefore, in a tone somewhat subdued—

"I am surprised, Major Sterner; indeed it excites my astonishment, that a man to whom I gave credit for such a delicate sense of honor, should bear insult with such immovable patience. In my time, at least, it

was not the custom to remain after one had been shown the door. In one word, sir, neither in former days nor now, could a gentleman of honor remain one minute in a house whose master had made such a speech to him."

"No, indeed, it is not usually my custom," said the Major, smiling, "to bear patiently a real insult, or the slightest approach to one, and you will easily perceive, sir, from my sincere language that I by no means look at your expressions on the insulting side. Far be it from me to take offense at your hasty words, which were the natural consequences of your just anger! Moreover, one ought not to be so particular with one's future father-in-law; every word is forgotten already, and, with your permission, I shall continue to be a daily guest in your house, because I am convinced that in the end you will bestow on me the same affection as you would on a future son-in-law."

"What the devil!" broke forth the post-inspector; "I would rather give the girl to your cousin, if he possessed nothing but the coat upon his back, than to you with all the riches, which to your shame you have got."

"This is much to be lamented," said the Major, "since the matter can no longer be altered. The best that you can therefore do, my worthy sir, is to forgive me all the headaches which I have caused you since my first appearance. In return you will find in me a son whose most earnest wish it will be, to make amends for the confusion and annoyance which his extraordinary behavior has occasioned to you, and to render you all the reverence, gratitude and love, which a good father has a right to expect from his children. Be persuaded; let my words find their way to your heart! Give me Augusta with your blessing, so that my lips may greet you with the holy name of—father."

The Major's voice had gradually changed from the cold sarcasm with which he had begun his speech, into a soft and beseeching tone, which betrayed deep emotion. And his whole manner spoke such fervent, irresistible eloquence, particularly when he pronounced the last words, that even Mr. Von Spalden began to thaw, and felt a certain feeling of contentment, when he saw the haughty Major thus transformed.

Augusta remarked this happy change.

"Beloved father!" cried she, seizing his hand, "make our happiness perfect!"

"Ah, William!" sighed his wife, going up to him on the other side, "permit joyful faces to be around you for once! I shall be thankful unto you to the end of my days, and obey your slightest wish with all submission!"

At these words Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck drew up her mouth scornfully, and could never afterward forget this ridiculous assurance.

"It appears to me, brother," said she, yawning, "that you can do nothing better

than say 'Amen,' that this canting scene may come to a conclusion, and we may get what will be much better—our dinner; I am heartily tired of all this stuff!"

The post-inspector ran through, in his own mind, the few objections he could bring forward to the marriage, and perceived that they were too paltry, and would be set at naught by the Major with his iron will. At all events it was always as well to have a rich son-in-law, and further, he did not wish to have Augusta discontented, so he wisely determined to make a virtue of necessity, and instead of letting himself be vanquished, to play the generous. Whereupon, with a highly comical air of solemn dignity, he laid Augusta's hand in the Major's.

"Well, in Heaven's name then! since all must be arranged in this mad way! and that brother Rudolph, the blessed spirit, may not be disobeyed, you may take her, Sir Son-in-law, and my blessing along with her; upon one condition, however, that you will be a more sensible man for the future, and never more play comedies. Or, if this necessarily must be, that your incorrigible impudence shall never again introduce me as an actor, or make my house the theatre."

"This is fair, and shall most willingly be obeyed," answered the Major, as he received the first paternal kiss and tolerably hearty embrace. After this the young pair drew near to Mrs. Von Spalden, who, with a sweet smile of maternal happiness upon her lips, pressed them to her loving heart.

"Dear Major, dearest Sterner, be affectionate and good to my Augusta! God and I alone know how much she loves you, and how worthy she is of your affection and care."

"I also know it, dear mother," whispered Sterner.—"Fear not for Augusta; for if the most ardent endeavors of a husband to fulfill the wishes of his adored wife can render her happy, Augusta will be so!"

Now it came to Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck's and Henrietta's turn. The Major politely kissed the hands of the two ladies. Augusta received from her relations a cold embrace and still colder congratulations.

"But where is our ex-bridegroom?" asked the post-inspector, who was now in a good humor. "I say, my dear Major, go and bring him here. Augusta shall help mamma to see about dinner, and I can in the mean time, have a little sensible conversation with my sister."

For once Mr. Von Spalden's arrangements met with no objections, and all were glad at being able to render him respectful obedience.

CHAPTER LII.

WESTERLIND'S CONFESSION.

"WHAT—what words are those?" the reader will ask with a certain dash of impa-

tience when he finds instead of the conclusion, the heading of a new chapter. "Have we not gone through every phase of the Novel? The plot is explained, the interest passed, the marriage determined on, and the blessing received!—What is there yet to offer?"

Most worthy reader! restrain your displeasure, and grant me your patience while I speak a few reasonable words to you;—mark! your first objection was: the plot is explained. It is true in the principal matter, but still not entirely. Moreover, why should we merely find pleasure in the plot? simple cheerful, every day life, with its various trifling scenes, is not to be despised; the first is hourly acted, the latter more seldom than we have it upon our tongues; in short, we approach more to nature if we exclude the first, and on account of its rarity, we may also find interest in the latter.

"Yes, but the interest is gone!"

No, dear reader! that you can not possibly assert, until you have read the book to the end. Can not the Authoress send you up a dessert, of which you have no idea, and which is as interesting—pardon me! my modesty should say—as little *ennuyant* as the preceding? If at a superabundant dinner, where you relish nothing, you suddenly perceive a favorite dish; or observe in the crowd a well-known face which reminds you of happy days gone by, or discover that your favorite wine has at last been placed on the table, are these not all very agreeable, although you knew beforehand that it would be your fate to eat, see and drink? Thus, one can not positively say where the interest ends—it hangs over us imperceptibly, even when we think it is lost; and it gradually revives until it becomes, as it were, young again.

"But the marriage is determined on?"

Yes, that can not be disputed, and it will take place; but I promise you to spare you all description of it: besides, I can not endure when a Novel ends with the wedding itself. For my part, I like to see a little how matters go on afterward. I am never so out of temper as when I have finished a book in which one only gets a glimpse of the rosy tints of matrimony, and then the curtain suddenly falls. I then think how will the skies look to-morrow, and the day after to-morrow? Will not clouds soon appear? These are gloomy forebodings; and it is so comforting if we can see with our own eyes, and hear with our own ears, how our hero and heroine get on in their new career.

"But the blessing?"

Worthy reader! let that be no objection; we will take it along with us: and if you will only just reflect, you will find that there are many persons who have made their appearance here, who would be all the better of a little blessing, and whom we must pilot into the harbor. With your permission,

therefore, I propose that we should commence anew, without deteriorating from your right to consider the following chapter as the conclusion, if it pleases you.

"Well, zounds! cousin! how have you got on?" cried Constantine, yawning and stretching himself upon the sofa, as the Major entered. "Has the fierce old growler given way?"

"All is arranged; but wake up, you unfeeling drone, I am overpowered with an excess of happiness."

"Yes, yes; it is delightful!—I feel the symptoms coming on again," said Constantine, smiling: "let me recover myself a little, for you have disturbed me most inopportunately. You must know, that in my dream I was just about to propose to some one: Goodness! what eloquence you would have heard, and—but it is all one with what I was occupied. You look like a somnambulist; you are neither capable of comprehending the fragrant rhetoric of my matchless speech, which, to the incalculable privation of all future suitors, is now lost; nor, understanding the barbarity of the crime of interrupting, just at the decisive moment, a poor sinner like me, who can only enjoy these delights in dreams. You woke me just as she opened her beautiful lips to answer me. Ah! Alexander, it is insupportable! it is not to be endured!"

"I admit that it is hard; and the least that you can demand from me as a compensation," said the Major, smiling, "is that I promise to turn your dream into reality, which, upon my honor, I will try to do."

"I thank you for this consoling promise, my excellent friend. Only keep your word, and I shall never regret the numerous splendid speeches and tender expressions full of feeling which I have thrown away upon the hard heart of your bride elect. But, heavens!" added Constantine, springing up quickly and leading his cousin to the glass, "do you look like a bridegroom to be about to sit down to his betrothal dinner? You are as covered with dust as when you came off your journey. Be off to Hjertberg's, and put your toilet in order. Henceforth it will be your turn to dress in the important black suit. I have put mine most carefully away, and hope the next time it is taken out that it may be on a calm, clear Friday morning, when we both betake ourselves to Wallaryd to wake up old Svalenius."

The Major nodded assent, threw his cloak about him, and hastened to follow Constantine's hint.

"My good Westerlind," said Sterner, as the former officiously helped his master to change his dress, "I know of old that you have an extraordinary delight in relating news. You have, therefore, permission to spread in this good town of L—— the un-

expected event that next Sunday week Miss Von Spalden and I shall be called in church Lieutenant Constantine and I have some what changed characters; but while he passed for the heir, I suspect you must have been prying into his affairs behind his back, and communicating your discoveries to a certain old lady, who could not possibly have learned this secret in any other way, and has doubtless rewarded you well for your trouble. It is my cousin's business to chastise you with a thorough good thrashing, but I will not have a spy in my service, therefore you have your discharge from to-day."

This was the greatest of all misfortunes to Westerlind. Not to see the beautiful Anna in the parsonage of Wallaryd, or the pretty chambermaid at Sorrbý Park again! To be obliged to resign the comfortable life he expected to lead at Sorrbý. What would he not do to be again in possession of these advantages? But he knew it to be vain to make the slightest objection, or the most distant attempt to vindicate himself after his master's severe look had frightened his usual self-command out of him, and his pale face and downcast eyes had pronounced the word "guilty." In great humiliation, therefore, yet tolerably calmly, he replied—

"My master has cause to be discontented with my behavior; but Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck offered me such a handsome sum if I would undertake to communicate to her all the news which I could gather about the heir, and every thing connected with his arrival, that I, who could not possibly then suspect my master's plans, and was of opinion, like every one else, that there were three cousins, gave my consent without much hesitation to a matter in which I saw nothing wrong."

"Then," repeated Sterner, "how long ago is it since you took upon yourself this honorable office?"

"When Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck left Ulriksdal, a few days after Whitsuntide; she had sent a secret messenger to beg me to meet her at the inn to which I had asked your permission, sir, to go to redeem the before-named bond. Directly after my arrival I was shown into a private room, where I found Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck. She gave me money and promised me more if I would faithfully report to her all that went forward in L——. I accepted her proposal, and after I had answered some insignificant questions I left her. When we arrived at Helsingborg, I immediately recognized Lieutenant Constantine, notwithstanding his disguise, and perfectly convinced myself of the correctness of my conjecture by some words which you exchanged during the journey, and which I treasured in my memory, although I did not appear to notice them. I considered it my duty, in consequence of my agreement, to acquaint Mrs. Von Stolzen-

beck with these important discoveries, and I did so."

"An odd idea of duty," said the Major; "but how did you do it?"

"I wrote; and she answered, and begged me to continue my observations. The correspondence went on regularly by every post, until she thought it necessary to come here herself to appear in person. I have now confessed my offenses more sincerely than if I had stood before a lawful tribunal; it is true they speak against me, but also show that I would never have erred if I had not been tempted by Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck's great promises and ample liberality. To this I add my humble repentance, and beg my master not to let my sentence be too severe."

Sterner went once or twice thoughtfully up and down the room, and then said seriously and firmly—

"No, Westerlind, you have erred too much, and too shamefully, to hope for pardon. A servant who can discover his master's secrets by deceitfully prying into them, and can sell them to the highest bidder, deserves no indulgence. You have heard your sentence."

A deep crimson overspread Westerlind's cheeks, but he bowed in silence and retired. In the door-way he turned round and asked—

"May I take the liberty of waiting upon you this evening, sir, to receive my written dismissal?"

"Yes, you shall receive your dismissal, your wages, and your board wages until the time that I return home."

"Yes, yes, we shall see," said Westerlind to himself, as he went down stairs. "Dismissal! board wages! forsooth!—Ah, all this is not quite certain yet. Something must be done to keep such an excellent situation: I thought that my sincerity would have moved him. But as this attempt has failed—anyhow it has done more good than evil—I must think of some other means, and I don't care a straw about Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck's anger, as she made me her last payment to-day. I am no honest fellow, if he does not say to me this evening—'It is well, Westerlind! take care for the future, &c.' And so I will. If I only just get well out of this scrape, I will never bite at a strange hook again; that is certain."

When after an hour and a half's absence the Major again entered the post-inspector's dining-room, the dinner table was handsomely arranged, and the young *fiancée* simply, but tastefully dressed. Henrietta and Constantine were helping each other to twine flowers round the covers destined for the happy pair, as if nothing had occurred between them, laughing and joking together like the best friends in the world, and chattering about the amusements at the baths,

and the grand ball given by the officers in —, where they enjoyed themselves so extremely.

"Good heavens, is that love?" thought Sterner and Augusta at the same moment, while they glanced at each other.

Ah, how happy were they, although circumstances only permitted them to perceive it in their eyes; for Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck's active tongue took care that the conversation should remain general; Mrs. Von Spalden seemed to have commenced a new life.

"This is the happiest day that I have spent for twenty years," whispered she to the Major. Even the post-inspector seemed pleased. He found the affair neither so strange nor so repulsive, when he had more narrowly contemplated all the advantages arising from it. Moreover—and this was at all events the main point—the Major had now totally changed his tone. He conducted himself now as politely, attentively and agreeably as he had formerly been haughty and formal. Mrs. Von Stolzenbeck appeared good-humored, and Henrietta was such a sweet, dear girl, that one could straightway fall in love with her. And with such amiable thoughts, such happy and thankful hearts, on all sides, the dinner began and ended! Wine, the friend of joy, circulated diligently round the table, and the post-inspector only grieved that the Burgomaster had not been present at this festival.

The Stolzenbeck family took their leave early, as the following day they were to commence their journey to F—. Lieutenant Constantine and the post-inspector accompanied them to Teifer's Hotel, and Mrs. Von Spalden, who still had a lively recollection of the dreams of her youth, left the lovers to enjoy alone the first few moments, that they could speak of their love and happiness. Still at the beginning nothing *was* spoken.

At length our young pair came to the sensible determination to be seated. A slight attempt was made to begin a little conversation.

"Oh, my Augusta!—my dear girl!"

"Ah! Alexander, to think that I could be so happy!"

"You, my Augusta!—you, indeed, deserve to be the happiest of women; would that I could make you so!"

"I am so already, my beloved!"

At last, after a sigh and a long pause, Augusta began with more composure:

"Can you really believe, my Alexander, that I have already a petition to make to you?—I do not know if it is right to try my influence over you; but it was impossible for me, on such a day as this, to refuse a request which was made to me, with such humble and respectful earnestness. Poor Westerlind was with me about an hour ago; his repentance and his self-reproach really quite affected me; he is so deeply grieved that he

has annoyed you; and as he does not dare to beg you for forgiveness, he has applied to me to obtain it for him. It appears to me that my aunt is more to blame than he, as she induced the poor fellow to become a spy. But all this you understand much better than I. If I am wrong, Alexander, far be it from me to urge the matter! I know that you would refuse me nothing that was not against your principles."

"God alone knows, my beloved," said the Major, as he put his arm round the petitioner's waist, "what I can refuse you! When you look me thus in the face, I fear you could move me to say yes to every thing, in case you should wish to misuse your power; but, happily, it is not against my principles to forgive: so Westerlind may remain; but the Lord have mercy on him if he ever makes himself unworthy of the kindness of her whose intercession the cunning rogue so luckily knew how to procure!"

When the Major came home in the evening, every thing happened as the crafty servant had calculated.

"You have to thank Miss Von Spalden's intercession," said Sterner, "that you may remain in your situation; but I advise you to take care for the future, and never again to meddle with things with which you have nothing to do."

"Never, by my life; never, sir!" answered Westerlind, and began again his usual occupations, while he thought to himself:

"What an excellent thing is wisdom! with this treasure, and in the modest costume of humility, one can turn the most critical circumstances to one's wishes and interest. And with the help of the gods the end of the song will be that I become steward of Sorrbý, and get one of my two sweethearts as a wife: it is only a pity that I can't take them both."

CHAPTER LIII.

RENEWAL OF AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

On a calm, clear Sunday morning at the end of September, the three panting post-horses attached to a beautiful open carriage struggled up a high steep hill, which was situated in the northern part of Småland. A gentleman of a tall and captivating figure sat by a young lady, who, trembling at the sight of the inaccessible height, hid her face on her neighbor's shoulder. The young man put his arm protectingly round her, and said coaxingly, "Do not fear, there is not the slightest danger! the horses are sure-footed, and the harness as strong as iron."

"Oh, notwithstanding all that I am sadly afraid! what an abominable hill! promise me, my Alexander, that the next time we come to such a one, I may get out of the carriage."

"That you certainly may, dear Augusta,"

said the Major to his young wife; "but is it not enough if I get out? you can be then quite at ease."

"The more so, as I will get out also," said Lieutenant Constantine, who sat opposite to them, "for this journey is never coming to an end. In the whole course of my life I have never endured a greater trial of patience, and I do not know what evil genius has prompted Alexander to the cursed idea of striking into all these crooked ways. Why could we not have gone by the usual road to Sorrbý, instead of pulling up and down every hill in Småland?"

"Calm yourself, good Constantine," said the Major, smiling, "for you, who are weary and tired of the journey, and moreover are dying with desire to reach the harbor, it may be less agreeable; but Augusta has had but little opportunity as yet of seeing the country; it is interesting to her, therefore, that we should thus protract the journey. You must give in to the ladies according to the good old custom."

"Besides," said Madame Sterner, who now that they had gained the level highway again, was calm and cheerful as usual—"besides, I can not see why cousin Constantine is so uneasy. He is glowing like one suffering from fever, and casts such wild fierce looks upon the lovely mountains and valleys on which we linger with admiration, as though he would annihilate them with his glances."

"Well, indeed, it is not to be wondered at," replied Constantine in some irritation, "if I am peevish, since the whole blessed day I have had such a tantalizing prospect before my eyes. With your permission, my amiable cousin, there can be nothing so tiresome for a young man who has just experienced the delights of a refusal, as to make a journey with a newly-married pair. I wish to God it had been my happy fate to have ridden forward in Westerlind's place!"

"Well, I must confess," said Augusta, jokingly, "that I was not prepared for such a declaration. Constantine has left his whole stock of politeness and manners behind in L—, as if they were articles of luxury which only take up space to no purpose. But jesting apart, my dear Alexander, if you know that your cousin suffered so much at the loss of Henrietta, you should surely have spared him so long a journey in our company; for the sight of those who are happy is the most painful of all things to a heart that suffers."

"Be not concerned about it, my angel! there is no fear of Constantine's sorrow," protested Sterner; "Henrietta is as little to blame about it as you. His impatience to get on, pours quicksilver in him, for he hopes that his sorrows will be soothed when he can impart his griefs to the valleys of Sorrbý, and be charmed by the song of the nightingales there."

"Ah, is it so? then we must forgive him. But see, Alexander, only see, what a beautiful church stands, as if by magic, before our eyes! I never saw one more beautifully situated! what a splendid church-yard! Ah, dear Alexander, hear how invitingly the solemn tones of the bells call us!"

"Will you not go to divine service, Augusta?" asked Constantine, in a tone of ill-humor; "it would be the very best opportunity of causing a few hours more delay."

"Indeed, I should like it extremely, if Alexander does not object."

The Lieutenant looked like a thunder-storm, and the Major called to the coachman to stop before the church.

Arrived at the large square, Sterner helped his wife out of the carriage, offered her his arm, and while her glances lingered on the simple beauty of the neighborhood, they slowly approached the church-yard. They stood still at the entrance, and their attention was involuntarily fixed upon a group, from whom they could not take their eyes. At a grave near the wall, which was separated from the others, surrounded by still verdant shrubs, and equally protected by two drooping birch-trees, whose branches cast their sad shade over this monument of the past, stood a little girl, of five or six years of age, twining wreaths of autumnal flowers, and hanging them over the shining porphyry stone, which rose above the grave. Oh, how lovely she was, the little delicate creature, over whose shoulders a cluster of dark, luxuriant ringlets waved! Her cheeks glowed with the brightest rose-tint—her eyes sparkled with animation and innocent joy; the tiny little hands worked so diligently, and she smiled while addressing incessant questions to her companion, a gentleman in the unimpaired strength of middle age, who stood at her side, kindly reaching her the flowers, while now and then a tear would glide down his manly cheek, but, like troublesome insects, was chased away by the back of his hand.

Never could a countenance express more candor and benevolence than his; but not on him was our travelers' attention fixed. Near the grave stood an elegant female figure, whose dazzling, enchanting beauty, and tasteful attire, attracted every one. She gracefully leaned upon a young man, whose tall figure, easy carriage, and noble features, formed an unusual degree of manly beauty. His eyes, as well as those of the lady, were fixed upon the gravestone, and the angel, who was adorning it. They spoke softly and affectionately together.

The little girl now rose, and as her bright eyes fell upon the strangers, she exclaimed, gayly:

"Ah, dear mamma, who is that?" and pointed with her hand to the Major and his wife. "See, mamma, what a beautiful bonnet she has! it is far prettier than yours!

see, how she smiles, she looks so sweet! And the tall gentleman; ah, he looks at me so kindly! dear Brink, lift me upon the wall; I wish to go down to them."

The beautiful lady smiled, and cast a glance of examination upon Augusta, who stood outside; but the gentleman said, with friendly earnestness, "Hush, my little one, that is not proper; those are strangers, who doubtless are going to attend divine service."

At this moment the Major hastily asked a peasant man who was standing by—

"What is this parish called?"

"S—aryd, sir!"

"S—aryd! I had a presentiment that it was," said Sterner to himself. "Whose grave is that yonder?"

"The Baroness Von K——'s."

"And the child, who is engaged with the flowers?"

"That is her little daughter."

"Ah!" said the Major; "then doubtless the gentleman there to the right is Doctor Klein?"

"Yes, it is," answered the peasant, "that is the doctor and his pretty wife."

"I knew Waldemar Klein many years ago," said the Major to his wife; "he will receive us well. Come, my Augusta, we will go and visit Julie Von K——'s grave together, that young unfortunate lady, whose love for the gentleman there, who has just turned toward us (it is the doctor), destroyed the bloom of her young life, and brought her to an early grave: do you remember, dear Augusta?"

"Yes, I still remember what you told me about it," replied she, softly, and pressed her husband's arm.

"My acquaintance with Klein," continued the Major, "began long before that time; we became acquainted in Stockholm, where I was as a cornet and he practicing at the Serafiner hospital."

They had now approached so near, that the doctor, who fancied that he recognized the strange gentleman's features, came hastily toward him, and exclaimed,

"Do my eyes deceive me, or is it really Alexander Sterner?"

"Waldemar Klein, yes, it is I; odd that after a separation of so many years we should meet again here!"

The two gentlemen shook hands cordially and with great emotion, then turned to the ladies.

"My wife," said the doctor, introducing her. "See, Marie, this is a friend of my youth, Major Sterner, with whom I have passed many a happy hour."

"And this is my young bride," said the Major, "for we were married only eight days ago." The gentlemen bowed politely, and respectfully kissed the ladies' hands; they blushed, bowed and smiled, then offer-

ed each other their fresh lips for a cordial sisterly kiss.

"What a real and unexpected pleasure," remarked the doctor, as he offered Madame Sterner his arm, and led the party to the grave, "to meet here, on this sacred spot, an old friend, and to see at his side this lovely pledge of his future happiness."

They all stood round the tomb. The Major knelt, and pressed his burning brow against the cold stone which now covered that once warm heart. The others drew a little back, feeling that their presence was not required; thus Augusta and Marie became better acquainted with each other. When the Major arose a smile of peace played round his lips. Waldemar stood silently near him; their eyes met, their hands joined in a firm pressure, and they understood each other.

"She was dear to us," whispered Waldemar.

"Sacred," replied Alexander; but he conquered his feelings, and turned again to the rest of the party. He then perceived the little girl.

"Ah, dear Hortense, how you have grown, and how pretty you have become!" He took her in his arms. "How like she is to her mother! look, Augusta," he held the child to her, "this is Julie Von K——'s little daughter."

"And this is Mr. Brink," said the doctor, "Julie's oldest and dearest friend."

"This name is familiar to me," replied Sterner, shaking him cordially by the hand; "the Baroness often mentioned it with esteem."

The whole party now seated themselves on two simple turf seats, which had been placed round the dear sacred spot, and a friendly conversation began.

"But," said the Major, looking suddenly round, "dear Augusta, I think we have lost Constantine. We separated as we got out of the carriage, and I can not imagine where he has gone." He turned to the strangers and added, "my cousin, Lieutenant Sterner, was of our party."

"If I don't mistake," said Mrs. Klein, directing her glass to the large square before the church-yard, "there stands a young officer speaking to Mr. Trasselin and his wife."

"Ah, indeed!" cried Sterner, "then we shall meet some more acquaintances. Does Mr. Trasselin preach in S—aryd?"

"Yes, we have the pleasure of hearing him every other Sunday," replied Klein. "He has become curate to the parish."

"True, true, I now remember that I heard that in Wallaryd, where I met the worthy pair during the Whitsuntide days."

"I heard him speak of it," said Klein; "he gave me your kind regards, and related his adventure on the road."

"It was not of the most agreeable kind," answered the Major, "I am certain his poor wife will never forget it. Well, I hope we shall see them after divine service."

"There is no fear of that," said the doctor, "for I hope that my friends will kindly not refuse, if I beg them to accompany us to Brunkenäs, and spare us a few days, and I think, Marie, that you expect the squire and his wife to dinner?"

"Yes, you are right!" and with the most charming smile she added, "And I join Waldemar in trusting that you will not deny us this pleasure. It would grieve our friends in Knapergaard, when they learned that Major Sterner and his wife had been so near, without sparing us a few days; for although not personally acquainted," continued she, with a charming bow of her lovely little head, "yet we have long known and esteemed the man whom a fortunate chance has brought among us."

The Major bowed, and carried the hand of the beautiful flatterer to his lips.

"I declare myself perfectly willing," said he, politely; "it only depends upon my wife's consent."

All then surrounded Mrs. Sterner. Marie begged so affectionately, the doctor so extremely kindly, and as there was no reason why such an agreeable invitation should be refused, Augusta said:—"What has Alexander's approbation, has also mine. I consider myself highly favored at being able to see more of my pleasant new acquaintances. But what will Constantine say to this arrangement. Has he not got a voice in the matter?"

"Oh, he must submit to it," replied the Major, laughing, "that will make one more trial to the catalogue of his merits."

The bells now began to ring in peals, and they all betook themselves to the church, where Mr. Trasselin soon made his appearance, and till the sweat stood on his brow, he belabored the hearts of his hearers with strokes of eloquence, and the desk of his pulpit with strokes of his fist, intending by this process both to rouse and to soften his auditors.

CHAPTER LIV.

STAY AT BRUNKENÄS.—THE COFFEE PARTY. —NEIGHBORS AND FRIENDS.

On the same evening we find all our friends again, assembled in the dining-room at Brunkenäs. Let us see, if the reader will not recognize his old acquaintances from Waldemar Klein.

Here, upon a low sofa before a round table sits an elderly matron, whose changeable features and lively flow of conversation have remained unaltered. It is Mrs. Von Horst. At the other side of the table stands the Major in a respectful attitude, patiently list-

ening to the minute details with which she is favoring him about her settling at W——, and all her difficulties and pleasures. Now and then he cast a longing look at his wife. She is also sitting on the sofa near the old lady, and is, as it appears, much more agreeably entertained by a somewhat pale, but elegant young man with whom she is carrying on a lively, and apparently agreeable conversation. The latter is Squire St—hal. At a little distance sits Mrs. Klein, the amiable hostess, at a large round table making tea. Exactly opposite, on an ottoman in the window, sits Mrs. St—hal, and here also appears Lieutenant Constantine, who with noble resignation had banished his longing and impatience, and has placed himself in a chair between the two ladies. Not a trace of his ill-humor is to be seen, all his griefs have vanished; he is obliging, polite, and amiable.

"Dear Mrs. Klein, permit me to assist you! I am noted for my skill in this branch of the arts. My dear Mrs. St—hal, have you read 'Eugene Aram'?" But pardon me, that is a most uncivil question; for there can be no doubt of it. What do you think of that work? is it not divine?"

"By no means! The work is excellent, the characters well drawn, and the whole possesses the charm of novelty; but it is in the highest degree terrestrial. The passions, the actions, and their impulses betray their human origin."

"Nothing is more natural than that, dear madam; I am myself entirely terrestrial, and, although I always imagine that my nature, more properly speaking, belongs to the element which we call air, yet I can not deny our relationship to our mother earth. But, where am I roaming to? we will leave it to the learned to dispute about air and earth; I only meant that Bulwer's way of describing his characters and adventures is divine. But look here, madam, have I not performed my self-imposed task admirably?"

"I should have done it in half the time," said Mrs. Klein, laughing; "you have kept us all waiting, while you have been discussing Bulwer's talents, and showing off your own."

"I am deeply grieved to have fallen under your displeasure; but as a not entirely worthless scion of the noble family of Mars, I will repair my fault. To-morrow I shall ride forth as your knight, to break a lance with the inhabitants of the forest, to your honor; and if I return as conqueror with my noble adversary upon my back or in my hunting-bag, I hope you will not disdain my homage, and will accept the tribute which I shall then lay at your feet."

But we will not dwell any longer at the tea-table; we will continue our walk through the room. Let us see! what have we here on the left? a card-table, round which are seated one old lady and three gentlemen.

"My ace leads, my friends," triumphantly cried an elderly gentleman, in whom we have the pleasure of recognizing the merchant Billing.

"*Grande misère!*" squeaked Aunt Lissas Greta's voice; and "I trump, I trump!" issued from the lips of our old friends Brink and Trasselin.

Whose turn is it now? that of those two ladies, who are sitting at yon distant window, engaged in a profound and earnest discussion.

"How? what do you say, my dear Mrs. Brink! you yourself got fifteen yards out of that pound of linen yarn? that almost sounds incredible!"

"No, not at all, my dear Mrs. Trasselin! if you remember that I only wished to have the linen a yard wide. But to go to another subject; what do you think of Mrs. Sterner's cap? I think it is of blond?"

"It is extremely pretty; but do you not also think, Mrs. Brink, that blue ribbons do not become her? and with regard to herself, I do not find that she is such a wonderful beauty as she was described."

"Yes, but in this the gentlemen are of quite a different opinion from the ladies. The squire said to my husband, as we left table after dinner: 'Well, Mr. Brink, you have often declared your eyes have never beheld a more beautiful woman than my late sister; but to-day you must admit, if you are not blind, that there does exist one.'"

"Ah, gracious heavens, what praise!—Well, what did your husband answer?"

"He replied that he was not blind, and that Mrs. Sterner was very lovely."

But we will leave these two ladies to their confidential discourse, and cross to the other side of the room, where we shall discover a new group. An old gentleman in a simple gray coat, bent with age, and with white hair round his wrinkled brow, was sipping punch. He stirred it up with a silver spoon, and handed some to a young man to taste, who was, at that moment, coming from an outer room.

"Excellent, my old friend," said Dr. Klein, as he patted the Inspector Lindman upon the shoulder.

If we imagine a host of little figures, who were fluttering like butterflies round the table, and who vied with each other in taking flight when Mr. Billing exclaimed, "Hush, hush! you deafen us, children," then we shall have a tolerably accurate survey of the whole assembly.

"Gentlemen," said the doctor, raising his voice, "the glasses are full, would you kindly take your places?" The seats were pushed to one side, and every one assembled round the bowl.

"First of all, ladies and gentlemen, a toast to our dear, esteemed guests, Major Sterner and his lady!"

A clinking of glasses and compliments ensued.

"Our second toast must be to our third guest, Lieutenant Sterner, with the wish that he may soon increase the number of happy married men! And now for a lively song; at this moment I can recollect none better than that of the old school,

"Be joyful, brave sons of the North."

The Major, Constantine, and Trasselin joined in, and the quartet went on marvelously well. The evening was passed in the utmost harmony, as also were the following days which the Major spent by turns in Brunkenäs and Knäper-gård. They separated with mutual regret, but were consoled by the promise that the Småland friends would visit Sorrbý next summer.

Without further adventure, our travelers reached the inn which was to be their last night quarters on the way, and from whence Westerlind, who had been ordered to await his master there, was sent forward to announce their arrival to Mrs. Svallenius, who, her own important self, was in Sorrbý, to have every thing properly arranged. About one o'clock the following afternoon, Augusta discovered the first outline of her new abode. What a strange, solemn feeling seizes the heart of a young wife, when she finds herself separated for the first time from the well-known environs of her home, from the play-haunts of her childhood, the world of her youthful dreams, and the advice and support of an affectionate, kind mother; when she beholds the strange, unknown roof, which points out what henceforth must be her resting-place! Oh! only she who has experienced the magic power of this sight, can understand the melancholy and painful feeling that then involuntarily seizes her soul.

She may love the man who conducts her to this, to her strange world, ever so much, still she will tremble when his lips announce to her that it is here that the roses or thorns of the future shall twine round the chain which has joined their fate forever.

Augusta also felt something like this when the Major, with beaming eyes, snatched her hand and pointing to Sorrbý's white walls, said, "See, my Augusta, see this is our dwelling-place! Here my true, never-fading love shall reward you for your trials and previous struggles."

At that moment, as the Major stretched out his hand toward Sorrbý, and his calm, clear voice whispered these loving words in her ear, Augusta felt as if her heart would break, from the numerous sweet and bitter feelings which overpowered her. She could not help weeping, although not from grief.

"Calm yourself, my dearest beloved," besought the Major, and kissed the tears from the cheeks of his young wife. "Poor Mrs. Svallenius will be out of temper if you are

not capable of fully appreciating her eloquent address, and the little surprises which she probably has prepared."

Augusta endeavored to comply with her husband's wish, and even before they had reached the beginning of the alley, she had to join in a hearty laugh with her two traveling companions, for a large lofty, triumphal arch reminded all three of the post-inspector's arches at the arrival of the heir. In the best of humors they continued their journey; but in the middle of the alley, where they could perfectly overlook the whole court and the persons who were assembled there, Augusta exclaimed anxiously, "For heaven's sake what are you thinking of, Constantine?" hastily seizing him by the tail of his coat, as she perceived he was about to jump out of the carriage, while it was driving at the utmost speed.

"He thinks of nothing, dear Augusta, that is evident!" said the Major, and called to the coachman: "heigh! stop! for heaven's sake! the Lieutenant wishes to get out of the carriage!"

With one spring he stood upon the ground, and darted off like an arrow. The cause of this haste was, that the Lieutenant had discovered on the green plat in the middle of the court an object, at the sight of which it was impossible for him to remain any longer sitting; and as the carriage stopped at the grand gates, Augusta saw him sink almost breathless at the feet of a young lady dressed in black.

"Now he will go perfectly mad," said the Major, laughing. "I verily believe the youth's heart is a Vesuvius; see in what embarrassment he has thrown the poor girl."

Augusta's eyes were immovably fixed upon the stranger.

"Who is she, Alexander? I have never seen a more enchanting creature."

"Then you have never seen yourself in a glass, dear Augusta," said the Major; "however, it is Wilhelmina Von Stålkrona."

"Ah, what a blessing!" whispered Augusta, as the gates were opened and the carriage drove up to the place, "that I had not seen her before, otherwise I should not have been so confident."

"Mere modesty, my Augusta; but see, here are all our friends." They had stopped before the grand stairs, from which Mrs. Svallenius, the pastor himself, the Misses Von Stålkrona, and Cornet Axel, were all assembled to welcome them with a shower of kind words, and to lead the young pair through a light roomy dining-room, into a large, extravagantly furnished room, where the most complete tea-table that ever rejoiced the eyes of a longing traveler, displayed all its dainties, temptingly inviting them to partake of its abundance.

After all hands had actively helped in disencumbering the young wife of her traveling

costume, she was led, by Mrs. Svalenius, to an ornamented seat, and that worthy lady delivered a speech standing, by the omission of which I shall certainly gain my reader's gratitude. It is my duty to mention, however, that its principal ingredient was a pretty eulogy upon her own exertions, for having arranged the house, to the best of her ability, before the arrival of its mistress. Whereupon followed formal congratulations, the concluding words of which should, properly speaking, have been in an under tone, but which, however, were spoken loud enough to be heard by every one:

"It is no hard matter to hope for happiness, when one already has the principal thing; I mean, when one is united to so thoroughly amiable and sensible a man as the Major is."

Augusta thanked Mrs. Svalenius, by a hearty shake of the hand, and an eloquent smile, for this assurance. And as the pastor's wife now seated herself, at Sterner's request, to make the coffee, he seized the opportunity to lead Wilhelmina to his wife, saying—

"I consider myself extremely happy, dear Augusta, to be able to present to you a lady, who is worthy to occupy the place in your heart next to mine. May Wilhelmina Von Stålkrona be a sincere friend and affectionate sister to you; she has long promised me this."

Augusta pressed her beautiful rival to her heart, with deep emotion, but what Wilhelmina felt, as she lent her head against the bosom of the woman who was Sterner's wife, we dare not describe.

"Ladies and gentlemen," cried Mrs. Svalenius, turning on all sides, "the coffee will get cold; we have time enough afterward to talk. Dear Mrs. Sterner now begin; this is your business to-day. No, I pray you, no compliments!—see, are the cracknels not delicious? and the gingerbread has succeeded capitally! the Lord be praised! I am—I am ashamed to say—mistress of the baking art!—Ay, how well you look there!"

In the midst of her flow of eloquence, Constantine entered, pale and tottering.

"No one thinks of me, not even you, Mrs. Svalenius, or else you would surely have pitied me, and not left me so indifferently to lie outside there, like the cruel one, for whose sake I brought on a spitting of blood, which, I feel already, will surely end in a consumption."

"Ay, truly, Lieutenant, I had clean forgotten you; but it is not to be wondered at, when one is occupied head and hands. Why, in the name of the world, did you come running along in such a way, instead of remaining sensibly sitting in the carriage, like other people? Now I recollect, Miss Mina, poor child, came rushing up the steps to me, and exclaimed, quite out of breath:

"Dear Mrs. Svalenius, I think that gentle-

man is not right in his head! Did you not say so, my little miss?"

"Not exactly so," said Wilhelmina stammering; "but, at all events, something of the sort."

"Oh, that he well deserved," said the Major; "no doubt the young lady did not recognize him in his new form."

"No, indeed, I did not recognize him, and scarcely do yet. It was only very lately that we learned, from the Major's letter to Axel, the comedy which he had managed, and we are still so astonished at the circumstances of this adventure, that it is not to be wondered at if I mistook Lieutenant Sterner for a total stranger."

"Now, do you see, Constantine; let that serve as an antidote to the consumption. Take a cup of coffee upon it, and you will be perfectly cured," said the Major.

"I don't know that," muttered the Lieutenant; "perhaps the young lady would have run away, even had she recognized me."

"Oh, if nothing else annoys you but the uncertainty of the matter," said Wilhelmina, with a gay smile, "I can assure you" (Constantine's eyes quickly brightened) "that I should have done exactly the same, even if I had recognized you."

"And would you have said exactly the same words?" asked the Lieutenant, in a trembling voice.

"Yes, I think, nearly."

The Lieutenant put down his coffee-cup, cast a look of despair at the young lady, and went to his room, where he remained the whole evening. After there had been a good deal of general conversation, Augusta prepared to follow Mrs. Svalenius to a review of the house. First they went through all the rooms, then it came to the kitchen's turn, the cellars, the store-room, the wash-house, and so forth, for which she received all the keys, and over and above, a host of good and useful advice, the most important of which was to keep a strict hand over the servants, to accustom the maids to work, not to give them too much to eat, and, lastly, in all cases of necessity, and weighty household matters, to apply to her; she would always be there to advise and help her.

In the mean while the Major had an opportunity to approach Wilhelmina.

"My dear Miss Von Stålkrona," said he, "it is almost unnecessary to tell you that the person whom I was to bring with me, and whom I now recommend to your warmest interest, is the same young man, who, when he was last here, although under another appearance, learned for the first time in his life what was real love. The alteration which has taken place in his outward appearance, can not possibly appear to you otherwise than advantageous, and, although of rather an inflammatory nature, yet his heart is the most upright, and the warmest that ever beat in

man's breast. His engagement with Miss Stolzenbeck is entirely broken off—Constantine is my oldest and best friend, the advancement of his happiness my fervent wish, and this happiness for the future rests principally in your hands. If my request has the slightest weight with you, promise me not to grieve him with such cold raillery as you bestowed on him to-day; for, believe me, notwithstanding that he appears frivolous, and doubtless in many cases is so, yet it really does pain him that you did not bestow one single kind word on him, as he flew toward you on the wings of joy and hope."

"Major Sterner," said Wilhelmina, "you are a great deal too partial to your cousin. An admiration which is so openly offered, can not surely be from the heart, and I confess that it does not please me."

"Do not judge so severely," besought the Major; "he thinks he need not conceal that he seeks the good graces of a lady whom he admires above all others. I see nothing wrong in that, and it truly grieves me to hear that he has the misfortune to displease you."

"I did not say that he displeased me," said Wilhelmina, in a more cordial tone; "only the way displeases me in which he offers his admiration."

"Oh! if it is only the form which he is to alter," said the Major, smiling, "then I am sure he will never cease to seek until he has found the talisman which will show him the right one." So saying, the Major raised Wilhelmina's hand to his lips, and whispered to Cornet Axel in passing, who was playing chess with Svalenius—"I must go up-stairs and console my poor Constantine."

The Lieutenant was lying on the sofa, without his coat, swearing at Westerlind for being so long of bringing the water which he had been sent to fetch.

"Why are you so slow?" asked the Major, when the servant at length came.

"Ah, sir, the Lieutenant has already drunk eight glasses of water; I have filled the jug twice, and this is the third time—I, therefore, thought that it was my duty to linger."

"All right, Westerlind; put the water there, and go down stairs until I ring for you. What is all this nonsense, Constantine?" asked the Major, seriously; "first you rush off like a madman, then spit blood, and drink one glass of water after another; you must not let the violence of your feelings run away with your good sense."

"Nonsense! I will listen to none of your lecturing; give me the water."

"No, not a drop more; you have had cooling enough."

"Yes, indeed, you see I am now therefore, on my honor, as cold as ice! I laugh at my own folly, and say with Björn: 'Grieve not weep for woman's sake!—no, God for-

bid!—unfortunately women fill the world; if one fails you—' You know the rest! Give me water, Alexander!"

"No, as I have told you already, not a drop more. You must be a man, Constantine! Your affair is not so desperate as you imagine; but you must perceive one can not obtain a girl's heart by violence. You must abide your time, and calm yourself."

"I wish to God you would be so merciful as to go your way, you type of phlegmatic tranquillity," replied Constantine, with some irritation. "Abide my time, calm myself—you ought to have been a Turk, that under the protection of your wisdom, you might have sat there smoking your pipe of patience. Your spirit for preaching has a narcotic effect upon me, I am sleepy; good-night!"

"There you may have your own way," said the Major, who took up the pitcher of water and went down stairs.

CHAPTER LV.

A GLIMPSE INTO THE FUTURE.—THE BANS.—THE LETTER.—MATRIMONIAL SCENE.

ELEVEN months had passed since the Major's and Augusta's marriage, and not a cloud had darkened the horizon of their conjugal bliss: the winter, the summer, and the now returning autumn, all had been spring for them. They were now in the first days of September, and the sun had only risen a few hours, when Lieutenant Constantine knocked at the door of the room appropriated to the peculiar use of the Major and his wife.

"What is the matter?" he heard Sterner exclaim; "it is too early yet, cousin."

"What is the matter! can you ask so indifferently?—it is not at all too early. May I come in?"

"Come in, poor Constantine," cried Augusta, kindly. "I expected that you would come up earlier to-day than usual."

"The Lord bless you for your consideration, dear Augusta," said Constantine as he entered. "This morning has already been an eternity to me; I never closed my eyes until twelve o'clock, and woke again at two. Oh, what a day!—It is a wonder I don't sink under this excess of happiness and impatience!"

He threw himself upon a sofa and began to speak of the subject which occupied his whole thoughts, and tinged all his feelings with one nameless joy. The Major, meanwhile, was engaged at his writing-desk, which stood in one of the windows, and was, evidently, quite absorbed in what he was about. Mrs. Sterner sat at a table on which tea and coffee were placed, and had on a charming morning gown: a maid stood behind her chair. Augusta pushed her cup from her as the Lieutenant entered, and asked:

"Will you take your coffee here, Constantine!"

"A life like the angels—no, still more glorious!—I think you spoke of coffee, Augusta; how can you be so foolish as to offer me coffee?"

"Well then, tea: what you please."

"Tea! pshaw—I live to-day only on nectar and rose perfume! The felicity which fills my soul can tolerate no other nourishment."

"But you must drink a cup of chocolate before you go; it is very unhealthy to go out in the morning without having taken any thing; and as this is your favorite drink, let it pass for the nectar this time. Go, Sophie, and order a good strong cup of chocolate for the Lieutenant."

"Well, to please you then!—Augusta, how do I look in this attire? I have not had it on since the last time I figured as heir. How different it was then!—What a heaven is in those four words: to—publish—the—banns! But do you remember how you trembled as I presented myself to you a year ago, in my character of wooer? That was an hour full of excitement; but you were as courageous as a heroine in novels, when you refused your harsh father's command to kiss the bridegroom. But your happiness may date from that time; and I—if ever a mortal had the hope to be happy, that being is myself. Now, dear Augusta, I venture boldly to beg you: Give me a kiss, as a blessing on the way!"

Constantine was at this moment full of earnestness, and his whole former frivolity seemed to have vanished. Augusta cast an inquiring glance across to her husband.

"Do it, Augusta," said the Major; "a kiss from *your* lips will be a pledge to him that the spirit of peace will hover like a guardian angel over his married life."

The Lieutenant bent his knee respectfully before Augusta;—he had now learned to esteem and value her as she deserved.

"Dear, good Constantine," said the young wife, as blushing she bent down toward him; "how fervently will not I pray for the happiness of you and your betrothed! I willingly give you this sisterly salute as a pledge of my regard."

With inimitable grace she laid her small white hand upon the shoulder of the kneeling young man, and her fresh ruby lips lightly touched his.

"Now, in heaven's name! will you never be done?" cried the Major, rising.—"Do you know, dear Augusta, how this scene appeared to me? It was to me as though I had already departed into eternity, and from thence beheld a successor to your love and heart! Yes, the illusion was so great that I only waited to hear the words: 'Alas! if the deceased Sterner could see this, how it would grieve him!'"

"What fancies!" said Augusta, as smiling

she hastened toward her husband.—"How could such gloomy thoughts occur to you, Alexander? I have more cause for them," added she, in an under tone, while endeavoring to hide a tear. "However, I will not yield one minute to the bitter thought that I might be separated from you; and yet, how many have been forced to give up the object of their affections—their all!"

"The Lord preserve me from the misfortune you have just alluded to!" said the Major, trembling at the mere thought; "that were a greater calamity than I could possibly bear!—No, my beloved, my sweet Augusta! since by the mercy of Providence we found each other, I confidently hope that we shall be spared to live together for the new and sacred duties which soon await us. Positively I do not know what came over me, but I must beg, Constantine, that you never again ask for a kiss from my wife. An interested spectator like myself, is apt to fancy of such kisses, that, as Frithiof Von Stahle says, 'evil spirits dwell therein: spirits from Nifelheim.'"

"But," said Constantine, laughing, "what did you just promise me? Was not Augusta's pure lips to be a pledge to me from the angel of peace?"

"Well, you stupid! and so they may be," replied the Major; "it is only with *me* that those dark spirits dwell; but we are prattling away the precious time. Have you ordered the breakfast, my love?"

"I will immediately," said Mrs. Sterner, leaving the room.

The reader will naturally guess, that this journey was to Wallaryd. The 20th of September, the Major and Augusta's wedding-day, was fixed on to unite Constantine and Wilhelmina's fate. The old Baroness slept her long sleep at the side of her departed husband; but it was some months after she had had the satisfaction of blessing the young people's engagement, that a sudden and violent illness tore her from her children and her little favorites, which she particularly recommended to Wilhelmina as the best she could leave the future mistress of Sorby Park. By the Major's help all mortgages upon the property, as well as Axel's and Aurora's portions, had been paid off; these were the papers he was looking through that morning, and arranging them so, that as he received them on the road, Constantine found himself sole proprietor of that pleasant little spot which contained his world of hope.

After six months' tender and faithful wooing, Constantine had at length obtained her consent. If Wilhelmina's love was not as warm as was her lover's, still her calm and noble character had a salutary influence upon him. Well she knew that the feelings which had once made her heart beat could

* Nifelheim, the hell of the Scandinavian mythology, from whose rivers came frozen vapors.

never revive again; their freshness was gone; but great affection and esteem for Constantine, the warmest friendship and a firm resolution to make him and herself happy, fully compensated for the absence of deeper feelings, and Constantine was more than contented. He did not expect to be worshiped as he himself worshiped: Wilhelmina, as the greatest proof she could give him of her esteem and unbounded confidence, had opened her heart entirely to him, and he was noble enough to esteem her doubly afterward. Every day their love increased, and their mutual confidence the more they became acquainted with each other; and they fervently thanked the Lord for their happiness.

This single year had much changed Lieutenant Sterner. Daily intercourse with the Major's family; his excellent personal qualities, which were always an example for Constantine; the pleasing soft manners of his *fiancée*, and her unassuming but elegant talents in society, which were as different as heaven is from earth to Henrietta Von Stolzenbeck's coquettish and childishly frivolous ways; all this, added to the influence which is ascribed to love, had altered the young man's slight nature, and given him the demeanor and dignity of a steady character.

The Major had written to his father-in-law to beg him and his wife to come to Sorby to be present at the two events which they hoped to celebrate; namely, Constantine's marriage, and the arrival of a little stranger into the world.

When the gentleman returned from Wal-laryd, the Major received the following letter:

MUCH ESTEEMED SON-IN-LAW—I received your kind letter of the 10th August with much pleasure, and thank you for the invitation contained in it. Although for fifteen years I have not left L——, yet I can not deny myself the gratification of being present at the wedding of my once supposed son-in-law, for I still entertain a certain kindness for him, and wish him every happiness. It might also be well to see how Augusta conducts her house, and how she behaves herself as a wife. You must not, my good sir, hold the reins too slackly at first, for whoever does that, has afterward to hold them deuced hard: the shorter the better, that was always my principle, and I have always found it answer. My old woman is well; and, as it would be a sin to refuse to let her see her daughter again, and I must have a carriage any how, I shall bring her with me. Love to Augusta, and tell her that I will have no unnecessary preparations made! I am the same as I always was—I tell this in plain terms, and hope that she will remember that, and will arrange accordingly.”

WILLIAM VON SPALDEN.”

“Yes, indeed he is the same, the old

tyrant,” said the Major, as he threw the letter angrily upon the table. “Is that a proper answer to your affectionate and only too humble request, Augusta? Not a word that shows that he shares our joy, our hope! But still I can forgive him that, because he himself never experienced what true paternal feeling was; but what I can by no means forgive him is the way in which he speaks of, and uses his wife. As he must have a carriage he will bring her with him! Is that a fit expression, the old bear!”

“Now, my dear Alexander,” replied Augusta, softly, “have you really forgotten in a year what papa is, and always has been, that you should get angry at this letter, which I find very polite, seeing that it comes from him? he can not change his nature, and unfortunately all men are not so inclined to spoil their wives as you are.”

“Ah, you little flatterer,” said the Major, with a brightening countenance; “you are indeed right, it is not worth while to be seriously angry at this letter. But I have a great mind to play the old gentleman a trick, which will make his gall rise, and at the same time teach him to value more the inestimable pearl which he possesses in your beloved mother; for if she were not a matchless example of patience, submission and resignation, they would live in a daily hell. You must promise me your co-operation in a little plan, which I shall explain directly.”

“Well, let us hear, dear Alexander, it is not likely that you should propose any thing that I would not agree to with pleasure.”

“As I have said,” continued the Major, “I should like to vex the old gentleman a little, as a punishment for his matrimonial despotism. I knew no better way, than if I make him hear a wife declaring herself exactly in opposition to the opinions of her husband, and keeping to her own views notwithstanding all the objections he can make. In short, dear Augusta, we must choose some subject on which you must promise to contradict me stoutly.”

“But, my dear, this is a very curious request, and I do not know how I can do it,” said Augusta, innocently; “I, who have lived a whole blessed year hand-in-hand with love and confidence, tremble at the mere thought of my father's angry eyes and his roaring voice, which doubtless would not be wanting if he were displeased with me.”

“No, that it would not,” said the Major; “but it will do a great deal of good; for he would have an opportunity then of perceiving through the splendid magnifying glass of self-experience, what a treasure he possessed. He must for once see, that a wife is, and ought to be, something better than a slave to the humors of the husband; and it is impossible for you to fear, when you have me always at your side.”

“Yes that is all very well, Alexander,”

replied Augusta, who evidently did not much relish the proposition; "but I fear I might not succeed in the character. How can I possibly openly contradict your will, which is always right and good? Indeed I do not think I can be so bold, Alexander."

"Ah, you little saint," said the Major, joking, what are you doing just now but gainsaying my wish? and besides, how was it with the hounds?"

"Well, yes, dear Alexander, this is the only case in which I was not of your opinion," replied Augusta blushing. "I admit that their barking annoyed me, and I was selfish enough to beg you to have them removed, although you had so much pleasure in them. I perceive that I acted wrongly, dear Alexander, and I now beg you with all my heart to forgive me. This very hour I will tell Westerlind to go and fetch them. But you are not angry with me, dearest Alexander," added she, coaxingly looking into his face, while an unconscious tear fell upon the Major's hand, which she held in hers.

"My dear, my beloved Augusta, my wife, what is this? What emotion! Need I say that I was only joking; can you fancy that I would seriously reproach you, and so unjustly? No, rest assured, my good Augusta that can not be, the dogs will remain in Sorby Park. Axel is glad to have them, as you may suppose, and I can quite as well go there first, when I wish to hunt, as set out direct from here."

"Ah, Alexander, you are so kind, so indescribably kind, that it would be my death, if those dear loving eyes were once to cast that dark flash upon me, which I have seen in them, if you are angry with any one."

"What nonsense, my angel! The flash retreats before the sun. My eyes can never look otherwise than lovingly upon you, my pride, my hope, my all! But we have quite wandered from our subject; do you agree to what I require?"

"Yes, I will do my utmost to contradict you, and to give as good an example of a willful wife as I possibly can."

CHAPTER LVI.

THE ARRIVAL OF THE POST-INSPECTOR AND HIS WIFE.—THE WEDDING.—THE DEPARTURE.—AGREEABLE NEWS.

ABOUT five o'clock of the afternoon of the day previous to the one fixed for the wedding, a broken down Holsteiner carriage rolled into the court of Sorby. It contained the post-inspector and his wife. We will not dwell upon the reception—that was much the same as usual when dear relatives meet. But with what words can we describe Mrs. Von Spalden's extreme joy, when she wit-

nessed with her own eyes her Augusta's great and real happiness!

As soon as some refreshments had been taken, the good lady forgot all fatigue and all the innumerable annoyances which she had endured during the journey, as constant mediator between the post-inspector and every innkeeper and post-boy, with whom he regularly quarreled when he met with opposition.

But all this, except its remembrance, had disappeared; and gay as a lark she followed her daughter through all the rooms up and down stairs, examining and admiring every thing. She never could have imagined such a house, such taste, such elegance.

"My goodness, child, I never, even in my best days, had the half of this luxury round me. Let us sit down here and rest. So this is the bedroom! and what curtains, so white and fine! and the bronze work about the beautiful bed, how well it looks! and these tasteful window-curtains of rich green silk! and what a mirror, how splendid! But, dear child, what in heaven's name are all those little things which you have on the table there? What a host of costly articles, all of silver and crystal, I think!"

"That is my toilet, mamma."

"What toilet, Augusta!" Mrs. Von Spalden shook her head in displeasure. "In all the course of my life I have never had any thing more than my little dressing-case with a comb and pomade pots, and I never should have thought that you were so vain, my daughter."

"Ah, dear mamma, do you think, then that I wished all this? No, certainly not! The room is exactly as I found it when I came here. My Alexander had taken care to get every possible comfort beforehand, and although I am not accustomed to the half of them, still it is only too easy to spoil one's self."

"Sternier is, no doubt, the best of all husbands," said Mrs. Von Spalden; "but I almost advise you not to bring your father into this room, for I am sure that it would enrage him if he found that you had deviated from the habits in which you were brought up."

While the mother and daughter continued their round, the Major led his father-in-law through the stables and cattle-yard, to the pasture-ground, fields, and meadows.

"Excellent, sir," said the post-inspector, over and over again, smiling with delight; "it is a real pleasure to see such horses, and such oxen. And the property seems to be well and industriously cultivated. I would not have believed, by Jove, that you had such an inclination for husbandry."

"One easily learns these matters when one has the will; and the desire for activity always exists when one is happy in one's domestic concerns."

"I rejoice with all my heart to hear you say this, my good sir, for when one has been

a year married, one pretty well knows what sort of a burden one has got in one's boat. Augusta behaves properly, I hope?"

"She is my good angel, the crown of my earthly happiness; a more excellent wife there can not be."

"Well, well, that is right," said the post-inspector, looking anxiously round; "only never let her hear such words, for that would be deliberately destroying all."

"How so?" asked Sterner, in astonishment.

"That I will logically prove to you: when a woman, who is by nature a frail creature, laden with many faults, which she of her own power, can neither improve nor turn to good—when she, I say, has learned by any means, that she is all that you have just expressed to an independent man, the spirit of vanity will soon take possession of her, and then farewell to all obedience and all submission, without which no concord between man and wife can exist. Marriage, you must know, is a little monarchy. Only one can command, and the rest must obey. If matters are not thus, then anarchy prevails; and, 'Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house, falleth,' says Sirach, I believe; well, it is all one; it was a sensible man who said these words; you can read them in the Bible."

"I know," replied the Major, half-smiling, "the words are in Luke, chap. xi., ver. 17; but I do not believe he intended them to be applied in such a case, and, any how, I consider my honored father-in-law's theory too severe."

"Not at all," said the post-inspector, becoming excited; "you must consider that this is not only a question of theory, but also of practice. An experience of twenty years, like mine, can, I think, lay claim to insight into this matter, and, therefore, I tell you freely, that in future you will have cause enough for repentance, if in this we are of different opinions."

The Major laughed, and turned the conversation to something else.

The evening passed quietly. The post-inspector's favorite dishes were on the table. After dinner, Augusta herself brought him his pipe; and, in an unusually good humor, he betook himself to bed, and said to his wife—

"The journey here was not so foolish. If the other days are like this, perhaps I may spend some weeks here. The Major is a sensible man. Order in the house—Augusta obedient and attentive—hem! it is not so foolish!"

On the following evening, at seven o'clock, Lieutenant Constantine Sterner and Miss Wilhelmina Von Stalkrona were married quite privately in the drawing-room at Sorrbj.

Svalenius performed the ceremony,

and his wife acted the hostess; no other strangers were invited. It was the bride's express wish that only her nearest friends should be present at the wedding; for the time of mourning for the deceased Baroness was not nearly over.

After supper they all proceeded with the new married couple to Sorrbj Park, where the Major and Cornet Axel had prepared various surprises. As the party stepped over the little bridge into the Park, they were received by a brilliant display of fireworks; several guns were fired off, and they arrived at the splendidly lighted house amid loud cheers. The next day there was a grand dinner-party at the Major's, to which all the ladies and gentlemen of the neighborhood were invited, and a brilliant ball in the evening closed the feast.

"I am very glad," said the post-inspector, two days later, to his son-in-law, "that all the noise and bustle, all the eating and drinking, the talking and laughing is at last over. Yesterday it was a very agreeable day at Sorrbj Park. She is a delightful hostess, the young Mrs. Sterner, a very pretty person, and Constantine is a nice, sensible fellow. But where is Cornet Axel going to now, and that harebrained thing, the young lady! It appears to me as if Sorrbj Park was not just the place for such a wild damsel to inhabit."

"The farm is not so small, believe me, sir, and the mills yield a good income," replied Sterner; "but as to Cornet Axel, we shall not long have the pleasure of his company; for he engaged himself last winter to the daughter of a rich merchant in Stockholm, and his future father-in-law wishes that he should remove thither. Aurora remains for the present with us. And when his prospects brighten, the young gentleman, whom you saw lounging about here, will step forth as accepted suitor. He will be thus heir to a rich, childless old uncle, and expects promotion. They are still young, and have a happy time before them."

"You mean the ensign, I presume. They are both almost children. But enough of this. Now that we have got peace again, it would be a pleasure to me to observe more narrowly the state of affairs in your house. To speak sincerely, there are one or two little matters that require to be somewhat altered. As for instance—"

Here the post-inspector was interrupted by the dinner being announced.

"Well, we can speak of it afterward. Let us now go to the dining-room, for I have remarked that you have the weakness of being uneasy if the young wife has to wait for us men, and yet it is only her duty."

"I thought it was our duty not to keep her waiting," said the Major, politely opening the door for his father-in-law.

To-day, for the first time since the post-

inspector's arrival, they were to dine quite alone. The Major had waited for this opportunity to carry his plan into effect. They were now safely seated at table, and the first dish was put down.

"Have you got any pike, my love?" asked the Major of his wife, casting an inquiring glance across the table.

"No, my love; I have not."

"Why not, my dear Augusta? you promised me some, and you know that it is my favorite dish."

"But it is not mine, Alexander; I think I have told you that already."

The post-inspector, who was just about to put a roast potato into his mouth, let this and the fork fall upon his plate, and trod his wife, who sat near him, upon the foot: she scarcely dared to look up from anxiety.

"Ah, pardon me, dear Augusta! I remember now," answered Sterner, with a polite smile. "I must console myself if you will let me have a pike at some future time. Were you so good as to have the dogs fetched from Sorby Park, as I begged you? I must be out early to-morrow morning to procure you some game."

"No, I have given no orders to that effect; for I have told you once for all that I can not stand the barking."

The post-inspector looked like a thunder-storm; he trod so hard on his poor wife's foot that she very nearly screamed aloud; but still he refrained, out of respect to the usages of hospitality, from mixing himself up in the matter. He emptied glass after glass, stuck one hole after another in his table-napkin with his fork.

"But, dear Augusta, is it not rather childish of you? Westerlind shall lock them up on the other side of the court."

"It is all the same; I shall still hear them, and I will not have them in the neighborhood; therefore the dogs shall on no account come here."

That was too much. The chair felt as if it was burning under the tortured post-inspector, and he fidgeted backward and forward.

"The devil take such folly," murmured he between his teeth. "Is that manliness? I wish I had never come here; for it requires more than human power to bridle one's tongue here."

"My love," said the Major, in a feigned tone of displeasure, "it is not agreeable to me to take the long round to Sorby Park; but if you really can not endure them—then—"

"Then you will reconcile yourself to it, like a sensible husband," said his wife, smiling.

"Exactly, my angel! You know that your wish is law to me!"

"God forbid that such a law should pass for all husbands!" screamed the post-in-

spector, as he shoved his plate from him, and rose from the table, incapable of controlling himself any longer. "What, in heaven's name, are you thinking of, Major? Are these words to use to a wife? Great God! that I should live to see such folly—that I should hear a man say to his wife, 'her will is law to him!' That would be a pretty law, forsooth! Ah, you degenerate child! did you hear such language as that in your upright parent's house? Look at your old mother! she trembles with pain and astonishment at your madness, and blushes for you, so that she can't look up! Believe me, if I had not ceded at the altar my right over you to another, you should have paid dearly for your boldness."

The post-inspector clenched his powerful hand in a threatening manner, and paced up and down the room with long and perturbed steps.

"In the name of the world, dear father-in-law, do not take the matter so seriously!" began the Major, in an apologizing manner; "it is a mere nothing. And besides, consider Augusta's condition!"

"Ay, condition here and condition there! my wife has also been in conditions, I fancy, but I should not have advised her, therefore, to have changed the order of nature!"

"But," suggested Sterner, "that barbarous time, when the husband treated the wife with this degrading harshness, is long past. The Lord be thanked, we have learned their value, and to raise them to that place which belongs to them in our hearts as well as in our houses! The wife should have her will and her rights, as well as the husband; she is the better part of our existence."

"Nonsense, stupid babbling!" exclaimed the post-inspector, "mere folly, just as the affair of the proxy was! I have acted upon God's clear and distinct words, and I will swear to them until my death:—'The husband is the head of the wife;' and again—'Wives submit yourselves unto your husbands.' We are the lords of the creation, and there's an end to it!"

With these words the post-inspector slammed the door behind him, and went to his room. Now, for the first time, Mrs. Von Spalden ventured to raise her eyes to Augusta and the Major, and to her astonishment she saw them both laughing heartily.

"My dear mamma, pray do not be so concerned; I am not quite so ill-behaved as I appear to be. Alexander persuaded me to this farce, to give papa a lesson an account of his despotism."

Notwithstanding this explanation. Mrs. Von Spalden seemed quite distrustful.

"Fear nothing, dear madam," said the Major; "my Augusta and I anticipate with pleasure each other's wishes. It was only a little comedy to show the old gentleman

how other men treat their wives, in order to give his old, despotic soul an opportunity of comparing his behavior with that of others."

In the evening, when the old couple retired to rest, the post-inspector said to his wife, as he laid aside his pipe, and for the first time for at least ten years, stroked her wrinkled cheek with his hard hand—

"Rigitza, my love, you have been an excellent wife; by heavens, that you have! I do not know how it happened, but I have never appreciated your worth till now. I swear, if you had ever taken it into your head to behave as Augusta did at table to-day, I would have wrung your neck! But when I come to consider the matter—which I have been doing the whole evening through—I find that the fault is perhaps not so much on *her* side, as on *his*; he has so entirely spoiled her. You women are like wax: you easily take whatever form one chooses to give you. Few men have succeeded like me; it is my conviction, Rigitza, mark well, that you are the best of all wives. And in case you never hear such words as these again (for a husband should seldom make use of them), still you now know my thoughts!" This was a triumph which repaid the astonished Mrs. Von Spalden for the bitter sorrows of long years. Seized with surprise and deep emotion, she bent down and kissed her husband's hand, and said, with tears—

"God bless you for these words, William, they have made me indescribably happy!"

"But," continued the post-inspector, after a short pause, "I stay no longer here. To-morrow afternoon, at three o'clock, we shall go!"

If a stroke of lightning had gone straight to poor Mrs. Von Spalden's heart, its effects could not have been more dire than that of these words.

"What, William, to-morrow?" stammered she.

"As I have said, not an hour longer! at three o'clock we step into the carriage. Good-night!" The post-inspector turned toward the wall, and went fast to sleep. His wife wept the whole night through in secret, and prayed in her heart to God, that he might send some impediment, for she too well knew that all persuasion would go for nothing.

The following morning, at breakfast, the post-inspector said to his son-in-law, after he had seized his glass and emptied it to the dregs—

"I must thank you, my good sir, for all your attention and hospitality. With a few exceptions, I have found your house very comfortable and agreeable; but I must now go; and I must beg you to order post-horses for me for this afternoon. I wish to start exactly at three o'clock."

Sternern was truly grieved at this announce-

ment; for he knew how painful it would be to Augusta to be so soon separated from her mother. He, therefore, tried very politely to press his father-in-law to stay, but he remained firm, and was deaf to all prayers and reasons.

"This is indeed very sad," began the Major again: "I certainly hoped, and rejoiced at the thought that our beloved parents would have remained over the now approaching period. I thought my father-in-law would have stood god-father to my first-born."

"Much obliged, son-in-law, you do me a great honor; but, to be plain, the tone in your house does not quite please me. You are in every respect a very sensible and upright man, but you have one weakness, which for the life of me I can not endure. You are not master in your own house, as I understand it; and when I think of all the bustle, fuss, and running, which will be here on this occasion, I shall be very glad to be far from it all. I wish you every happiness, but I prefer remaining at home in my own room. You must excuse me," added he, to somewhat soften this expression, as he saw an angry flush pass over the Major's face; "besides, who knows, I am of a passionate character: one can't be too cautious; I might in passion frighten the young wife so much with my noise, that it might do her harm. Matters of this kind are no joke, and I can not answer for myself."

Sternern reflected on the post-inspector's last reason, and found that it was not without sense; but when he cast a look upon his weeping wife, he determined to make one more attempt.

"I will no longer be obstinate, I will reconcile myself to what I see can not be altered; but if I might venture, I would beg a particular favor and kindness of my father-in-law."

"Speak out, son-in-law! ask any thing you wish, only not that I should remain here," said the post-inspector, who inwardly rejoiced to get thus rid of the matter. "I am indebted to you, and I should be most happy if I had an opportunity of showing it."

"Well now, dear father-in-law," began Sternern, brightening up, "leave mamma with us for some time. When all is happily over, she will return to L—."

"What, are you mad! leave my wife!" cried the post-inspector, astonished. "Her from whom I have never been separated, the—the—the, in short—God forgive me that I should make use of so foolish an expression as you did yesterday—the half of my existence; better existence I will never say. Here Rigitza, my love," said he, with a sort of emotion, "will you separate from me?"

Mrs. Von Spalden was silent, and only pointed to Augusta, who, violently weeping, held out her hands imploring toward him.

"Father, O my father! forgive me! Yesterday was the first time that I have departed from the lessons which you have given me, and it shall be the last."

This had more effect than all entreaties; his heart, which was already somewhat moved, was softened.

"Augusta, my child! come to your father's heart, he shall not have come to your house to cause you sorrow!" He kissed her on the forehead and wiped her tears away. "So now be comforted; you were always a good child. It is true you have been a little spoiled by your husband, but you will never be a bad wife, that I am sure of; and as a great proof, the greatest, my child, that I could give you of my paternal love, on account of your tears, and the request of your excellent husband, I will leave your mother here."

Augusta now wept tears of joy on her father's breast, and a moment of calm peace prevailed.

"My child," said the post-inspector, rising, "my daughter, my beloved Augusta! we now part, perhaps for this life! If you will be happy for the future, do not despise your old father's instruction; be a good and submissive wife, as your mother has been to me."

"My dear, good father! I shall always be it!"

The old man laid his hand upon her head and blessed her; then he shook the Major's hand, and said:

"I do not despise your theory, but I myself will adhere to the old one. And now—" He turned to his wife—"I will fix a time for you, with which I hope all will be contented. Rigitza, my darling! you may remain six weeks here; but on that very day you must be at home again."

"Ah, how good you are, husband," said Mrs. Von Spalden; but not without anxiety she added, "but if up to that time all is not over, how is it to be then?"

The post-inspector's looks darkened, and his brow knitted.

"Rigitza," said he, solemnly, "I command that every thing shall be at an end by the time that I have fixed!"

"But, my dear father-in-law, under such circumstances, can a command be punctually obeyed?" observed the Major, smiling.

"No, not in reference to your wife, that's a matter of course," answered the post-inspector, somewhat embarrassed when he perceived that, in his excitement, he had uttered a piece of folly; "but with respect to my wife, I say that it shall be at an end. Six weeks, Rigitza; do you understand?—not a day longer."

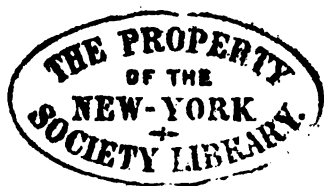
"Very well, William! God forbid that I should vex you! I shall be at home exactly on that day."

"Well answered, my wife! and you shall be welcome."

At three o'clock the post-inspector departed, and had scarcely been at home a week when, luckily for their domestic peace, the joyful news arrived, that a new "lord of the creation," as it pleased the post-inspector to call his sex, had appeared in Sorrbý.

"The Lord be praised!" said he, raising his night-cap devoutly.

"Lord, I thank thee with all my heart!" said he, with unfeigned emotion, when his good old wife came back on the day fixed, and embraced him with tears of joy. "It would have been my death, Rigitza, if you had delayed longer; we shall never separate more, even though I should have to take a journey to Sorrbý again."



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